

## Ark Volume 19

### Act 1: War Preparations

-The new facility 'Office of the Lord' has been registered in the name of Ark-nim.

The 'Office of the Lord' is a necessary space for the Lord of any territory and is a symbol of pride. The Lord will be able to confirm various details about the territory from the office and a loyalty bonus will be applied to help the development of the territory. When working on territory related business here, the progress rate will increase by 1.5 times.

\* Progress rate of all territory related business increases by 1.5 times in this office.

\* Development of the territory when the Lord stays in the office increases by 1.2 times.

\* The resident bond and loyalty when the Lord stays in the office will increase by 1.2 times.

"Do you like the office?"

Galen indicated the wide office with a satisfied expression.

"It can't be helped even if you don't like it. This is the Lord's private office now."

It had been 4 days since Ark became the Lord of Lancel. The original Town Hall was a three storey building, with the 1st floor being the meeting room, the 2nd floor the complaints room and the 3rd floor was Galen's office. So until now Ark hadn't had an office. However Ark didn't care about that.

'I might be the Lord but I can't spend a lot of time in Lancel. Galen will take over as the mayor when I'm gone so I don't need to bother with the office.'

If he wanted to create the office then he would have to use the public funds. But now things had changed. Lancel was Ark's territory, not simple a place where he had invested in the real estate. In other words, he used to be a stockholder in the Lancel Corporation and now he was the CEO. So his viewpoint about the territory had also changed.

'How Lancel develops will depend on me. If the territory develops then its income and fame will rise. So I can't use the public funds of the territory lightly.'

Ark was the type of user who could give up 1 gold today for 2 gold tomorrow. Because it was the public funds, he couldn't afford to spend it freely. But Galen was firm on this decision.

"It might be uncomfortable for Lord-nim but it will be worse for the residents if this office wasn't here. I know that Lord-nim will be absent a lot of times. But the Lord's office isn't just a place for business. It is a symbol of Lancel's Lord and VIPs from other areas will be offended if there wasn't this office to greet them in."

Galen used to be the temporary mayor and now his title had changed to the Lord's secretary so he was more assertive than before. Ark had risen from a shareholder to the president. So Galen who was in charge of maintaining the village was like a Director? Anyway, Ark could find no justification to oppose Galen's decision. Thus Galen pushed and encouraged the residents and after 4 days, the Lord's office had been constructed as the 4th floor of the Town Hall.

"Everything in the office is made of top quality products. The villagers also prepared the interior decorations. The raccoons constructed the table and chairs, while the ex-thieves who had taken lessons from them manufactured the tapestries and shelves. The leather goods on the walls are products of the Wolrang and the Meow planted the seeds in the indoor garden."

Galen explained the office like he was a real estate salesman.

'I honestly wasn't very enthusiastic.....'

Ark scratched his head and looked around the office. He had been reserved about it but once completed, he actually quite liked it. The office had various influences on development which Ark hadn't expected. Of course, it only applied if Ark stayed in the office but if he concentrated then he could accelerate the growth rate of his territory. But what caught Ark's heart weren't the bonuses applied but the balcony. Since the balcony was on the 4th floor of the Town Hall, it had a panoramic view of Lancel village.

'Somehow it lifts my mood.'

Thanks to the new town plan the buildings and roads were neatly arranged. A wide fence surrounded the village with fields spreading out from it. Lancel village wasn't simply a landscape to Ark anymore.

'Lancel is my territory so I can change it as I wish.'

"Can we clear the plains on the right side of the village to create a potato field?"

When Ark said such things, the residents immediately moved and the plains were cleared. And it was possible to confirm the changes instantly through the numerical values.

-The residents have reclaimed the plains and your territory has expanded.

\* The villagers are joyful about the successful reclamation (Residents' Bond +70)

\* The successfully reclaimed plains had improved the food situation (For 4 months food +1,200)

<The Lord can control the amount of food distributed to the residents. The distribution of food will have an influence on the residents' bond, degree of loyalty and the development speed. In addition, it is possible to sell surplus food to other areas to raise the income of the village>

Closing Statement: Clearing of plains used 2,750 gold. Additionally, the

maintenance fee of 150 every 1 month is taken from the public funds to pay the farmers. There may also be additional expenses when a disaster happens such as blight, pests or drought. The appropriate budget setting was needed.

Of course, he was previously the Lord of Silvana but he had always intended to sell it to Raiden so he didn't really care. But when it was his estate then it became quite fascinating. What was needed to develop a balanced territory? Even if he left Galen to manage the village, Ark still needed to make decisions as the Lord. Still, he couldn't excessively develop the territory. Clearing plains and creating new roads all required money. Therefore the development should be steady and properly managed. If he created new roads then cleaners and repairmen were required to maintain it, so he had to be careful not to let the residents' dissatisfaction pile up. Creating new fields also required hiring farmers as well as crops. Therefore he needed an appropriate grasp of the budget as well as figuring out the abilities of the residents before starting some investments.

'In the beginning they didn't have a grasp on a system.....'

In fact, the old Lancel village usually had 30~40% of residents with free time. Sometimes 3~4 people worked in fields that required 10 people, and other times 10 people worked in fields which required 5~6 people so the progress speed was quite slow. Now thanks to Ark, Lancel village had developed a new system.

'Isn't the Lordship quite fascinating now that I have an interest in it?'

Didn't it feel like the famous simulation games 'Sim City' or the 'Tycoon' series? No, it was a virtual reality therefore the sense of accomplishment couldn't be compared to those classic games. Although he couldn't sleep well for four days, developing the village and increase the residents' bond and loyalty was interesting enough that he forgot about sleep. Of course, he had to decide on the budget and work personnel first but if the results were good then he could feel a sense of accomplishment. Ark suddenly looked at a building that occupied a corner of the

village. During the past few days he spent in the village, he realized that the NPCs in Lancel village also had a wide variety of personalities just like in reality.

‘Eh? That building?’

A few days ago during the evening, he had been standing on the balcony of the Town Hall’s 3rd floor when he detected some strange movements from that corner. On one corner of Lancel village was a shabby building. However this building had always been locked. Therefore he felt suspicious when he first discovered the building but he eventually forgot about it. If he hadn’t been standing on the balcony at that time then he wouldn’t have noticed the suspicious group of people gathered around the building.

‘I had forgotten about that building. I wonder who lives there? And why are there people around it at this hour?’

Something was happening in Ark’s territory! Ark was intrigued by this and moved to the area before using Stealth. He held his breath for a while and searched the surrounding people. They were all dressed like merchants but he couldn’t remember their faces. In other words, they must be peddlers travelling from other areas.

“Is it time?”

The merchants in front of the building checked their time pieces and muttered.

‘Time? What are they waiting for?’

Ark wondered as he tilted his head to one side. Then there was the sound of the door being unlocked and it opened. And the people that appeared from inside.....

‘Eh? Aren’t they the raccoons?’

That’s right. The one who opened the door was from the raccoon clan.

“Were you undiscovered by others?”

The raccoons restlessly looked around and said. The merchants gathered in the area smiled and nodded.

“Huhuhu, yes. You don’ have to worry.”

“Okay, come in.”

‘Why on earth are the peddlers and raccoons meeting together like this? Judging from their actions it doesn’t seem to be the first time..... Hmmm. Well, I’ll know once I enter.’

Ark who was hidden with ‘Stealth’ entered the building with the merchants. The building had blackout curtains so it would be dark even with the sun out. But the raccoons soon lit up several lamps. Ark instantly became perplexed.

‘Eh? What the, this is.....?’

Surprisingly there were a large number of japtem piled up in the building. The merchants’ eyes sparkled as the light showed the form of the japtem.

“Hmm, the items are quite okay this time?”

“Huhuhu, of course. After all we are the ones who made them. It is in a different class from the sloppy goods created by humans.”

The raccoons replied with a prideful expression.

“The price is the same as before?”

“No, this time it has increased by 5%.”

“What?”

“Look, as a merchant it should be obvious. It is better quality than the previous goods you bought. If we should it elsewhere then we would receive at least 5~6% more.”

“Well, I guess but....”

“These items aren’t easy to get. If I don’t get any profit from it then it will be useless.”

“But it will be unfair if you’re the only one who leaves with a profit. Honestly, it isn’t easy for merchants like us to meet like this. Shouldn’t we divide the profit among ourselves in order to cement our bond? 3 percent.”

“Sheesh, as expected from merchants. I understand. You have to get rid of these things quickly. But just to be clear. You shouldn’t dispose of anything bought from me nearby. This has to keep being a secret.”

“Huhuhu, is this our first time? We want to trade with you for a long time so don’t worry.”

‘Eh? These guys?’

After listening to the conversation between the raccoons and the merchants, it was possible for Ark to guess the situation. They gathered in this building during the evening in order to do black market dealings. It was unnecessary to explain but when buying or selling things through the store, a certain amount of tax was included. That subsequently became the income of the village and the Lord. But these types of black market dealings didn’t require a tax. Additionally, it wasn’t required to pay the market price for the goods. As a result, you could purchase the same goods for 30~40% cheaper than in the stores. Of course, selling it through the black market also gave benefits to the raccoons.

‘But to do black market dealings in my territory!’

He never even imagined it! Anyway, now he couldn’t wait and see anymore. One of the main sources of income for Lancel village was the tax. But now precious goods were being traded in black market dealings. While it didn’t compare to the amount that the raccoons normally produced, he couldn’t condone it as the Lord. Ark was able to drop Stealth and reveal his presence when he realized something.

‘Wait? Right now I can seize everything and lock the merchants in jail. But.....’

Ark thought for a while and sneaked out of the building. Then he visited the Seutandal branch and spoke to no. 358.

“I have a request. In the future, please keep an eye on that building every night. If merchants enter the building then please sneak in using Stealth and record the prices of the goods traded there. Of course, please keep this a secret from everyone.”

“Huh? What.....?”

“I’ll tell you the details later. If it works out well then I’ll compensate you generously.”

“I understand. If it is a favour from Ark-nim.....”

‘Huhuhu, all of the money from the black market will be mine!’

A wicked smile spread on Ark’s face as no. 358 nodded. There was a reason why Ark hadn’t dismantled it right there. If the products were sold normally through the raccoons’ workshop then Lancel would only get a profit from the taxes. It was 5% of the listed price. But how much could he get with the black market profit? In the future the raccoons would continue to sell things through the black market. And it was clear that the raccoons would collect the money from the dealings. If he stopped the black market at an appropriate time then he could seize all of that money.

‘If I intimidate the raccoons then I will be able to put that money into my own pocket instead of the estate’s. In other words, he could embezzle the income of the raccoons. Huhuhu, then I can obtain the profits from the raccoons’ black market dealings!’

That was Ark’s true purpose. Ark even made a wall which hid the building where the black market occurred. If the black market was safer than it would become more active. And he would leave it until the appropriate time.



‘But I never would’ve guessed if I hadn’t seen it. I had been thinking that the NPCs just lived without thinking. If they have no jobs and complaints pile up then they will also turn to illegal acts, just like users.’

The management of his territory was starting to feel more interesting than before. It was to the extent that he wanted to forget about other stuff and just focus on Lancel’s management.

‘But my real work starts today.’

Ark who had been locked in recollections while looking at his territory closed his eyes. When he opened them, Ark’s eyes weren’t that of the Lord anymore.

“Have you prepared what I requested?”

“Yes, it’s been prepared in cash like you asked.”

Galen nodded and laid a bag of money on the table. It was five 2,000 gold bags and one 1,000 gold bag which added up to 11,000 gold! Ark received that money for putting 4% of his 9% shares as collateral for a loan. When Ark had become the Lord it was worth 10,600 gold but by the 4th day the market price had risen by 400 gold.

‘In just four days 265 gold for 0.1% became 275 gold. Since some fields have been cleared, a new road is in progress and the buildings for the 3 guilds will soon be completed, the market price will continue to rise.’

If he had waited a bit more then he might’ve been able to borrow 1,000 more gold for the 4% shares. But Ark couldn’t afford to wait that long. In addition, he had to pay an interest of 3% every 15 days so it wasn’t good to borrow that much.

“Now I will leave Lancel to Galen ajusshi for a while.”

“Don’t worry. I will complete the work you’ve assigned perfectly.”

“Please contact me by mail if there are any problems.”

“I understand.”

Then Galen lowered his head and suddenly grasped Ark's hand.

"I know why Lord-nim needed to borrow the money. And I have no doubt that you will accomplish your purpose. Yet if you fail then don't take it personally. Lord-nim already has Lancel as a territory."

Ark looked at Galen before laughing and replying.

"I know."

Ark was also aware of this. Even if he failed and lost, Lancel would still be Ark's territory. He had poured all his passion into Lancel during the last four days. But there was no meaning in failing!

'From now on I have to concentrate all my nerves on retaking Silvana!'

Ark had a determined expression on his face as he exited the Town Hall. That's right. It was the reason why Ark used his shares as collateral to borrow money. It was to secure war funds to recapture Silvana.

'Galen told me not to worry if I fail to recapture Silvana but..... No! I still have Lancel left after failing but that is no guarantee. And the chance to recapture Silvana won't come again. My dream for the last 2 years will fail with a single defeat.'

Ark's heart started pounding at the thought. He had gone through so many hardships in New World. It was probably 3~4 times more than normal users experienced. Sometimes he suffered tremendous damage and if the crisis wasn't overcome then he would be forced to quit the game. However, Ark had overcome those crises and ended up gaining more money and levels than other users. In other words, a crisis provided him opportunities to grow. A crisis was a chance! That was now Ark's philosophy in life. But Ark didn't think it was that simple this time.

"Heavy.....this is the first time the gold feels so heavy....."

Ark had prepared 18,435 gold! Using his special privilege, he received a loan of 11,000 gold! In total it was 29,435 gold! When converting to cash,

it was close to 300 million won! It was Ark's entire fortune which he had gathered after 2 years of conquering crises. Although it was impossible to feel the weight of the gold in the bag, for the first time in 2 years his bag strap weighed down his shoulder.

'If possible, I don't want to make such a risky gamble.'

To be honest, Ark would like to protect the 30,000 gold that he gathered and continue his adventures. But after the Lancel defensive war it became certain that he couldn't coexist with the Hermes alliance. If he left the Hermes alliance alone then it was just like leaving a ticking bomb in his warehouse.

".....I have no choice. There is no turning back now!"

Ark muttered like he was reciting a spell. It was a spell to change his anxiety to courage.

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It was originally set in the suburbs but thanks to the new town plan, Ark's store was now in the centre of the village so it was thriving. In particular, after gathering the 3 guilds a lot more users had been attracted and gathered around his store. But it would be a problem if he couldn't see any goods to the customers. In order to raise the required war funds, Ark had sold most of the goods in his warehouse. He also didn't have the money to buy new products right now. But they were Ark's long-awaited customers so he couldn't just let them leave. After his stock had disappeared, Ark borrowed from other stores and was carrying out a sale. Of course, they were goods borrowed from other stores so he would only receive a 2~3% profit. But in this situation the profit wasn't an important issue.

'Even if I fill the store up later, I won't be able to bring back guests that I lost. The profit margin doesn't matter as long as the store is still operating.'

Thanks to that Ark's store was still crowded with people even while having no stock. No, instead the goods diversified even more and the customer satisfaction increased. Ark had also settled the other NPC stores' dissatisfaction at having customers monopolized by Ark's store.

'Thankfully Sapjil and Ulmeok are the ones who have to move all the goods..... I also give them a monthly salary. I'll just have to be forced to let the monthly salaries pile up.'

At the sight of Ark's smirk, Sapjil and Ulmeok felt like crying. Once again, it was impossible for them to be freed from Ark. His summons were no exception. While Ark was staying in Lancel, his summons Razak, Radun and Racard were put to work. But the most surprising thing was that his summons were unexpectedly talented at business.

"Now, now, come. Come in. Take your pick, your pick! We have everything!"

Clack clack clack, ttadadak!

Ssak ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Racard who was wearing big glasses and a hat clapped and attracted the users' attention. Razak also helped using his shield while Radun spat up items and juggled them. There was a reason his pets were engaging in business in eagerly.

"You make us fight and now you're even making us engage in business? We also want a short break sometimes. I've never heard of a pet selling things. Master is so mean!"

Racard's complaints piled up as the Lancel defensive war ended and he was shoved into the store. While he could beat them up, he now that wouldn't successfully motivate their labour. After worrying for a bit, Ark offered a suggestion to his summons. Instead of paying salaries, they would earn points based on their performance.

Points Method
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10~100 points: x1 snack food can be eaten (points required depends on ingredients and price)

100~200 points: A mistake made in battle will be waived (the required points depend on the mistake).

100~400 points: Winter equipment provision (points required depends on quality).

\* 1 point earned for the sale of 1 item. Can be used at any time

."P-points?"

Racard froze after hearing about the points from Ark. Since they had to eat so much food for growth, the pets were sick of it but sometimes they also craved junk food. But it was impossible for Ark to give away the ingredients he collected. So his pets became frustrated by not being able to eat junk food. Furthermore, his pets were most afraid of failing in battle and receiving a penalty. However, if they collected points then it was possible to eat the junk food or avoid the penalty! But that wasn't his pets' final goal. If they collected 100 points then it was possible to receive winter equipment. During the last winter, they didn't even have a pair of gloves so it was normal for his pets to tremble. Right now it was late fall but winter was coming, and knowing Ark's nature it was obvious he wouldn't buy them any gloves. Yet if they collected points then they would be able to request winter equipment! So his pets' sales pitches heated up as they started a painful struggle for survival.

'Huhuhu, yes if they want to scramble to collect 100 points then they won't dare betray me. And all I have to do is buy one or two gloves. Furthermore, if I didn't do this then wouldn't they keep on complaining about clothes during the winter? Well, it means I can utilize my pets as shop assistants.'

Ark smirked and went up to the 2nd floor.

"Have you put everything regarding the Lordship in order?"

When he entered the 2nd floor, Roco greeted him like he was a husband returning.

“Yes, to some degree.”

“.....Now shall we begin already?”

Then an excited voice was heard from behind Ark. Ark looked back to see that Bread was climbing up the stairs behind him. However Bread seemed somewhat strange. His whole body was covered in dust like he had been rolling around on the ground and he seemed to give off a sense of weariness. It was because of Ark that Bread was in such a state. In fact, Ark had struggled with one problem when he became determined to retake Silvana. It was that the beast clans and ex-thieves from Lancel would have to enter the war. Currently he could mobilize 300 people from Lancel. That was half of Lancel's population. If they died then Lancel's population would decrease by that much. Ark honestly didn't want them to participate in the war. In a situation where the troops numbered several thousand, 300 people weren't a big number. Although they were only 300 people, the beast clans had special abilities that could be used strategically. Ark was betting everything on this battle. He feared sacrificing the NPCs but he needed them in his troops. Anyway, if he was defeated in this battle then wouldn't Lancel be attacked by the Hermes alliance's retaliatory strike? In addition, the NPCs were eager to get revenge on the Hermes alliance that was the source behind Lancel being attacked. So Ark decided to address the troops from Lancel.

“This expedition is more important than ever and it will be a fierce battle. Whether I win or fail, the damage received won't be small. Because of my selfishness, I honestly don't want the residents of Lancel to enter the war. But it is true that I need your help. Thus I decided to do this. You will undergo severe training and if I judge that you have sufficient power then you can participate in the war.”

Since then the troops had gone around various hunting grounds and dungeons in the Argus Mountains and started their combat training. And their training instructor for 4 days was Bread.

“How is it? Was there any progress?”

“Obviously. Who am I?”

Bread laughed as he sat down in a chair.

“I can’t confirm it directly since I can’t see the NPCs’ information window, but everyone seemed to have gained 5 levels. The Wolrang and Meow were originally a combat species so their power didn’t rise that much, but the ex-thieves who changed to guards has gained a lot in a short time. I can’t assure you. It won’t be easy if they go against the users.”

In fact, Ark wasn’t that worried about the beast clans’ combat power. The Wolrang and the Meow possessed general strength and agility equivalent to the users. During the siege of Silvana, there was a 50 level difference between the users and the Meow but their amazing agility overwhelmed during a 1-on-1 combat. Ark was worried more about the ex-thieves than the beasts. But if the more experienced Bread was full of confidence then they should’ve reached a minimum level.

‘No matter their level, the raccoons can be strategically used.....’

The core of the Lancel troops was the raccoons. Their cannons had more range and damage than arrows, not to mention their abilities to dig tunnels, repair buildings and heavy equipment. These characteristics could be used strategically.

‘Although I couldn’t use it in the Lancel defensive war, the raccoons’ secret weapon that they’ve been preparing is ready! Their firepower absolutely won’t be lacking!’

It was the ultimate weapon in which Ark had invested considerable funds! The reason Ark had been in Lancel for 4 days was because he had been waiting for the completion of the weapon being secretly developed. That’s right. The raccoons had a secret research laboratory underneath Lancel. The research was spurred even more after Ark became the Lord and the secret weapon was finally completed yesterday.

‘This means I’ve finished all the preparations in Lancel. Together with the weapons, the number of troops from Lancel number 270 beasts and guards. Only 30 of the guards are staying behind to protect Lancel....’

The guard divisions from the three guilds were already present in the village so he didn’t have to worry about Lancel’s defense. Ark tapped the table and began to talk.

“Now, let me sum up the situation. There are 270 Lancel troops. Shambala has gathered 1,300 people from the Eastern Nation and Seutandal. There are also 700 applicants from the users in Seutandal. And Redian has managed to gather 1,000 people from Bristania.”

“So there are a total of 3,270 troops?”

Bread nodded and then muttered like he was thinking out loud.

“The Hermes alliance is expected to have at least 5,000 troops. There is a difference of 1,500 people between us. Will we be gathering more troops before moving to Nagaran?”

“Yes.”

“So? How many more will we gather?”

“1,000 more people.”

Bread thought for a moment before giving a heavy sigh. In fact, there was a reason Ark had to rush to retake Silvana. Jewel’s face had been shown to the public on TV. Of course, Jewel had withdrawn from Hermes in advance and they had officially denied the alliance’s relationship with Jewel through the forums of various sites. However 100% of Jewel’s group used to be in Hermes, not just 1~2 people. NPCs wouldn’t know but the users couldn’t obediently accept Hermes’ claim. Shortly after the broadcast of the Lancel defensive war, the Hermes alliance had been extremely criticized by the users. On the other hand Ark, no Dark Wolf was a hero! With such an atmosphere, couldn’t Ark gather users to attack Hermes? Whether in reality or the game, people gravitated towards those with a cause. If he took advantage of the



current atmosphere towards Hermes then he could attract high level users.

‘On the other hand, the morale of the Hermes alliance would’ve fallen.’

The morale of the troops in the game was important. No, morale was important to win in the game. If their morale fell in the game, their eagerness to fight would decrease and they would die. Thus the battle was in his favour if the morale was already decreased from the beginning. However, there was no guarantee that the atmosphere would continue forever. If time passed then that atmosphere would disappear. This was the reason why Ark thought it was the proper time to recapture Silvana. As he mentioned earlier, it wasn’t a problem collecting reinforcements. The problem wasn’t gathering reinforcements but maintaining them. Ark had a good reason. Many users might support Ark. But there were problems if they wanted to participate in the battle. If they participated in the battle then they needed money for consumables and repairs. If they didn’t belong to a guild or alliance then there were no benefits for users to participate in a siege. So they had to receive some money for the damages they might incur during the battle. In other words, Ark had to bear the cost for things such as equipment repairs, food and various supplies. The minimum cost for one person was 10 gold. Hiring level 250 users required at least 10 gold. However Ark had already collected 1,700 users. If he collected 1,000 more then he would have 2,700 users. 10 gold per person meant 27,000 gold. The thousands of people needed in a siege was no joke.

‘I’ve prepared 30,000 gold for the war funds!’

It was an enormous amount but it wasn’t enough to hire thousands of troops. Since Ark had no guild or alliance, he had to bear that cost alone.

“But it has to be enough. It is now or never.”

Ark replied in a firm voice. The reason Ark was able to think that was because of the siege rules. After Ark revealed Alan’s use of the ghost guild, the rules of the siege had changed. Since Sid was currently infiltrating Silvana, Ark was able to hear the new siege rules from him.

“The system now is that guilds at the Shrine of War have a sequential chance to challenge a siege. Since the siege is more large scale than before, it will only occur once every 2 weeks so some people will have to wait months for a chance.”

“Then if a guild registers later then they’ll have to wait?”

“Not really. At the Shrine of War, the guilds can apply for a 100 vs 100 battle separate from the siege. The guild that wins will have their priority increased.

This was the new rules of the siege. Even if Ark collected the troops, if he didn’t have the priority right then he couldn’t participate in the siege. Of course, he could participate in a few battles against guilds but if there were a lot of guilds with higher priority than him then it would eat a lot of his funds. His funds were very tight so there was no possibility of doing that. But he didn’t have to wait this time.

“The rules right now..... In fact, recently there haven’t been a lot of sieges. Since the size of the alliance in Nagaran had become larger and their troops numbered in the thousands, few people were willing to attack them. If they tried a siege and failed then the guild would become incredibly broke so there was none that would try it.”

The Hermes alliance was one of the 5 powers in Nagaran. They were a huge alliance with more than 5,000 people so trying a siege with them would just make them lose the funds. Because of that, there had been no sieges in Silvana for half a year.

‘But in fact, the Hermes alliance is actually struggling financially. If the other influential alliances know this information then they will apply for a siege. No matter how much Hermes tries to hide the information, one day it will leak.’

If someone showed a weak point in Nagaran then it was the end. When the circumstances inside the Hermes alliance were revealed then the other unions would attack Silvana like hyenas.

'If Silvana is taken away from the Hermes alliance then I will have to fight a new union. Furthermore, they might even collect the remnants of the Hermes alliance. Ark only just had the minimum funds.

It was why he had to recapture Silvana now, even if it meant borrowing money.

"Then there is no other choice? Okay, it's decided so I'll depart right away for Silvana. I'll bring the gathered troops to Silvana."

Bread shrugged and muttered. The person giddy about the upcoming battle wasn't just Bread.

"I'll also do my best to help you."

Roco was also looking forward to going onto the battlefield with Ark. Then Sapjil who was moving goods on the 2nd floor gasped and looked aghast.

"Eek? Even Manager-nim is going?"

"Of course. Why else have I been taking lessons from Melody?"

"But who will look after the store?"

"You guys will have to do that."

"Huh? But....."

Sapjil spoke in a worried voice.

'Ah, that's something I hadn't thought of.'

Ark finally realized a problem he hadn't considered. Even without Roco, there was still Sapjil and Ulmeok left to look after the store. But he felt anxious at the thought of leaving the store to those two. After a lot of education they had become steadier than before, but there was no guarantee that would continue without Roco there. No, Ark's store was open 24 hours like a convenience store so he couldn't possibly trust in the two of them.

‘But Roco’s abilities will play an important role in this battle.’

Ark’s recognition of Roco’s skills had changed 180 degrees after the Lancel defensive war. Not only did Illusion Sonata have fantastic strategic value, Roco’s buffs could also be stacked onto hundreds of users. With both Lariette and Roco as rear support, the power of the buffs applied would be huge.

‘Should I leave the store to Sid during the siege?’

Ark considered this. Then Sid jumped with surprise after he talked about it with him.

“What are you saying? Do you think I’m a person without any work to do? I’m a very busy person. As the manager of the foreign division of the Continental Commerce Firm, how can I been seen in a suburban store like this?”

“S-suburban?”

“You should forget about the idea. I helped you with persuading the merchants’ guild but that is it. You should restrain from asking anything more from me at the moment. Because I am someone who also has a lot of work. I can’t just keep taking care of Ark-nim’s problems. Well, that might change if Ark-nim pays me.”

Sid snorted and muttered. Ark’s face became blank from Sid’s reaction. In the past he couldn’t even yawn without Sid flinching. However, Sid’s insubordination was long scheduled. Now Sid had fully occupied a place in Nagaran. As the foreign division manager of the Continental Commerce Firm which had a great deal of large trades, he had already changed to his 2nd profession. And he collected a huge amount of money. Now Sid no longer needed to flatter Ark anymore.

‘..... So his head has become really big?’

Ark glared at the cheeky hobbit. But Sid had been capture during his weak point so he was different from the three pigs who had been tamed with violence. He couldn’t squeeze Sid like he could the three pig

brothers. Furthermore, Sid could also expose some of his internal affairs to the Hermes alliance. If Sid disclosed the circumstances to the Hermes alliance then Ark would be in trouble. Although Sid knew Ark's character, he had gained confidence recently after realizing how important he was to Ark. Therefore he had no intention of staying at Ark's store. Ark felt furious at the thought.

'Unbelievable. Now he is being rebellious? I have to use some excuse in the future to re-educate him. But I can't pay attention to Sid now. There are bigger problems so I have no choice but to move on. But who can I trust the store to if Sid won't stay?

Ark was sighing with frustration when it happened.

"That..... President-nim, there is a visitor for you."

Ulmeok suddenly appeared on the stairs and spoke.

"Visitor? Who?"

"It is the first time I've seen them....."

Ulmeok answered in a hesitant tone. In the past, Ulmeok wouldn't have reported the guest to Roco or Ark. But after being caught by Isyuram, he now sought Ark and Roco out to report straight away.

'Who could be looking for me?'

Ark scratched his head and descended to the 1st floor. When he went down a teenage girl wearing robes was looking around the store. Ark looked at the girl and tilted his head to one side. It was the first time he had seen the girl. Nevertheless, he couldn't help feeling like the girl was somewhat familiar. It was definitely the first time he saw her but what was this feeling? What on earth? At that moment, the girl seemed to feel his gaze and turned her head. And she stared at Ark before laughing.

"Ah, I can tell with just one glance. You're Hyun-woo. No, are you called Ark here?"

Ark was even more confused by the girl's words. Hyun-woo? Ark? Didn't that mean the person knew who he was in reality as well as the game? Furthermore, it wasn't possible to change genders in New World so the person was definitely a woman. However, the only females Ark knew in reality were Roco and Lariette.

"Excuse me..... Who are you?"

The girl became puzzled by Ark's question. But then she seemed to have realized something and laughed mischievously.

"Let's see? Who am I?"

"I don't feel like playing with you."

"You're not friendly at all."

The girl pouted at Ark's blunt words.

"Oppa who is it?"

Roco had descended and looked at the girl with curiosity. The girl blinked several times before her smile widened.

"Oh, are you Hye-sun? Hohoho, now I know why Hyun-woo plays the game so much. How interesting. This is good."

"W-who.... Eh?"

Roco stared at the girl before her eyes suddenly widened. Then she ran like a squirrel and embraced the girl. Ark was even more confused by Roco's reaction. Then the girl looked at Ark and sighed.

"My daughter in law is 100 times better than my child."

Ark instantaneously felt like cold water had been poured on him. A cry escaped from Ark's mouth.

"Eek? It can't be, Mother?"

“Who am I if not your mother?”

The teenage girl swelled like a balloon and retorted.

## **Act 2: Gathering in Nagaran**

“Mother, what’s with that face?”

Ark grumbled as he gave So-mi a strange glance. That’s right. The female inside the shop was So-mi, Ark’s mother. By the way, it was because of that face that Ark committed the sin of not recognizing his mother. When his mother had used New World’s character creation process, she had transformed into a teenage girl.

“Looking young and pretty is never wrong.”

..... That was his mother’s answer.

“Then you managed to manipulate the game’s character creation process.”

“Was it difficult? Don’t you just have to scan an old photo when the message appeared? Scanner? At any rate, when I scanned the photo my character was programmed automatically. Wait? After thinking about it, my feelings are a little hurt. Even if my face de-aged 25 years, how can my son not recognize me? Mother is sad. Even Roco recognized me.”

“I previously saw the album with Mother in it. You looked so pretty that I had to remember.”

“Oh, Roco is also pretty.”

So-mi stroked her head and Roco acted like a ca.t. Ark had also thought that So-mi’s face was slightly familiar. But how could he remember it from a photo in an old album shoved into the closet?

"I don't know. Mother just looks like a high school student. It is like a scam."

Ark pouted while murmuring. However, So-mi ignored it and turned around.

"Who are the people with you? Your friends?"

"Oh, you are Ark's mother? My name is Bread."

Bread laughed boldly and approached.

"It must be tough for a beauty like you to raise a monster like Ark."

"Your fool, this is from a 25 year old photo."

"Hmm, this guy is still naive. I don't want to hear such lousy words. Despite it being 25 years ago, the features can still clearly be seen."

"You're a good friend. You are called Bread? Please continue spending time with Ark in the future. Despite him being older, that child still doesn't know things like that."

"Hohoho, I'll teach him."

Bread laughed and hit his chest. Ark sent him a sour look but the atmosphere had become more harmonious because of Bread. But Sapjil and Ulmeok's faces had fallen. There was a reason for their expressions. They hadn't had good experiences with the people associated with Ark. Sapjil still had the memory of being beaten by Isyuram, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members. Unlike her outer appearance, Roco also had a personality of steel. Therefore in their heads, 'acquaintances of Ark= dangerous people.'

'The person who appeared this time is Ark's mother. Despite being a woman, I can't be reassured. Wasn't she the one who created Ark's personality? If she gets mad and shows her true personality then she might be much scarier than Ark. It would be nice to have a break from swollen eyes.'



Thus the two of them hid in a corner, not even daring to breathe loudly. While they were trembling, Roco suddenly remembered something and asked So-mi.

“But Mother, wasn’t there something you want to give to me a while ago?”

“Ah, that’s right.”

So-mi then took something out of her bag.

“Winter is coming soon. It is interesting that we can even feel the coldness of winter in a game. Hohoho, at first I thought the room was cold and even checked the temperature of the boiler. But it was on its original settings. So I thought of you guys and prepared this. I actually came here because I wanted to give this to you directly.”

The things which emerged from So-mi’s bag were gloves and scarves. But the gloves and scarves were different from the ones found in general stores. The overall shape was similar but the gloves and scarves had flashy patterns on them. When Ark received it, an information window popped up.

-Wool Gloves (4th class product, Deluxe)

Armour type: Gloves (Clothing)

Defense: –

Durability: 40 /40

Weight: 3

User Restriction: –

Gloves made using high quality wool. The gloves are a relatively plain style but it is possible to feel the skill of the craftsman through the simple needlework and neat finish. The particularly noteworthy part is the hand stitched embroidery on the back of the gloves. The precise

pattern of the eagle flying will give courage and compassion to the users.

<Sewing Option (S rank completion): Cold resistance +30%, Style+20>

<Embroidery Option (S rank completion): Courage +20>

-Wool Scarf (4th class product, Deluxe)

Armour type: Scarf (Clothing)

Defense: –

Durability: 40 /40

Weight: 4

User Restriction: –

With the ability to wear it as a hood or a scarf, it is a stylish scarf made of wool. The part which goes around the neck is so fluffy and warm that it is possible to feel the meticulous care the creator put into it. In addition, the small eagle design on the end enhances the style. The eagle embroidery is so close to perfect that the person can wear the scarf with pride and courage.

<Sewing Option (S rank completion): Cold resistance +40%, Style+20>

<Embroidery Option (S rank completion): Courage +30>

‘Huk, what is this?’

Ark’s eyes popped out at the information window. The gloves and scarf Ark received had a 4th class ranking. In addition, the sewing option only appeared when the sewing skill reached intermediate. She had only started the game yet So-mi’s sewing skill had already reached intermediate? That was not the only surprise. Gloves and scarves were naturally cold resistant. That was why users bought them during winter. Style was also an option attached to clothing. However the numerical values this time were no joke. Originally the gloves and scarves had an

average cold resistance of 15%. But these ones had 30~40%? The cause of this was due to the S rank completion rate. In fact, sewing was a general purpose skill since it was easier to learn than the special production skills like alchemy. It also had a low failure rate. If created roughly than a completion rate of B would come out. But this part which made this skill special was the fact that it was extremely difficult to get a completion rate above A. In order for users to reach a higher proficiency, they needed to create 100 items with an A rank completion so most of them gave up at the advanced level. Yet this wasn't an A rank product but an S rank!

'Hasn't my mother only been playing the game for 3 months? Furthermore, what is this embroidery option? I've never seen anything like it.'

The eagle embroidered on the gloves and scarf was marvellous. He had seen clothing dyed different patterns but this was the first time he had seen directly embroidered clothing. And it was also the first time he saw an additional option attached to clothing. No, he hadn't even imagined it until he saw it. And the additional option added 20~30 courage!

"Do you like it? I've checked it several times but this is the embroidery option that people like the most."

So-mi spoke casually. But it wasn't something that could be spoken about that casually. It was natural for users to like the courage option. Not only did courage increase resistance to states like 'fear,' it also increase damage and attack speed. So the stat was similar to a joker type which could affect different abilities. However, finding courage attached to clothing was extremely rare! Yet So-mi had no idea how big it was that she attached it to gloves and scarves.

"It's strange, when I embroider the eagle design I fail one in every three attempts."

'Oh my god, then she has a 60% chance of attaching this option?'

If other tailors heard So-mi say that so casually then they would've been overcome with depression. However, there was another reason Ark was baffled.

"Uh, Mother, this is.....!"

Roco's eyes shone like a lantern at the unexpected gift. It was an S rank luxury item so of course Roco liked it. The problem was the design of the gloves and scarf! Ark had received blue clothing with red embroidery. Meanwhile Roco's items were red with blue embroidery. That's right. Ark and Roco had received a couple set consisting of gloves and scarves.

"Two people who get along should wear things like this. Oh, is it not in style these days? You don't like it?"

"D-d-don't like it? Wah, thank you Mother!"

Roco embraced So-mi tightly while trembling. Ark was inwardly uncomfortable but he couldn't express that. No, these were presents that his mother put effort into making so he couldn't find fault with them.

'Isn't this a pair of gloves and a scarf created by Mother?'

Ark remembered the times in the past when So-mi created a sweater and a scarf for him. When did it stop? It was probably when the sweater and scarves that had a price tag started to look better and cooler than his mother's. And when did his mother start buying it from the department store instead of making it for him? How did his mother feel then? He felt a strange feeling in his chest as he looked at the gloves and scarf.

'And seeing Mother acting like a normal person.....'

When So-mi first started the game, she couldn't even walk but now she had managed to ride a horse to Lancel. After arriving at the store, she had acted like a healthy person. Although it was in a game, seeing So-mi walk around casually caused unspeakable emotions inside him. In fact, his mother didn't talk about the game with him. It was probably because she wanted to surprise him with this visit.

"Ah, that's right!"

Then So-mi seemed to remember something and reached back into her bag.

"Actually I've also packed things for other people."

"Other people?"

"Yes, for Detective Gwon and the other rehabilitation members. And these are for your pets. Since they are children you frequently talk about. Give these to the children. I've heard about their sizes from Roco so it should fit."

"You even made some for my summons?"

Ark looked on with amazement as countless wool clothes emerged. For JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members, she had prepared 11 sets of gloves and scarves. There were also gloves and scarves for Racard, Razak and Radun. So-mi also knew that Radun had different forms.

'It's worked out well. If my summons collect enough points then I can just give them this.'

That was Ark's thought as So-mi also gave some gloves and scarves to Bread and Sid.

"I didn't know you two were here so they aren't personalized to you."

"Eh? We also get some?"

"Please continue getting along with Ark in the future."

"Thank you!"

"Ohh, absolutely thank you!"

Bread and Sid cheered as they also received gloves and scarves. Meanwhile, Sapjil and Ulmeok who were in the corner continuously sent So-mi envious looks.

“What are you doing? I also have some for you two.”

“Huh? F-for us?”

“I asked Roco. Didn’t you two support Ark a lot in the store? You’re Sapjil and Ulmeok aren’t you? I’ve prepared things for you as well.”

“Mother, you don’t have to bother giving those guys anything.”

Ark murmured in a testy tone. Even though the clothes were classified as low price items, it was already late fall. It was the season where gloves and scarves were popular. With these types of options, he could receive 5 gold from them. Aside from JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members, he thought it was fair that such expensive items were given to Bread and Sid for free. But he had to say something when those guys who received a monthly salary were about to receive some. Then So-mi frowned and said.

“Why are you acting so mean? A person shouldn’t act like that. Aren’t they people as well? You should treat the people close to you better.”

So-mi then sighed and spoke in a soft voice towards Sapjil and Ulmeok.

“Don’t mind him. I’ll apologize instead.”

“.....!”

Sapjil and Ulmeok’s eyes widened. Roco, JusticeMan, Isyuram, the rehabilitation members, even Bread and Redian..... All the people surrounding Ark had bad personalities. But So-mi was different. She treated them like humans! Not only was she a pretty girl, despite actually being 25 years older, but she protected the pigs and even prepared handmade gifts for them. Sapjil and Ulmeok shed tears as they received the gloves and scarves.

“Ohhhh, to give such items to us.....!”

“Thank you. Can I call you Mother?”

“No, please let us call you that!”

“Tsk tsk, your feelings seemed to have been damaged in the meantime but don’t worry. I will punish Ark severely.”

“We’ll swear allegiance to Mother!”

Sapjil and Ulmeok cried out without hesitation. Ark sent the two pigs a sour look.

“Sheesh! Those children are really playing around. How dare those pigs call her Mother?”

Then something popped into Ark’s head like lightning. If Roco left the store then it would be in a pinch without a store manager. While So-mi came to visit Ark and Roco in Lancel, she had no thought about roaming around. Then couldn’t she look after the store for a while? So-mi still lacked experience in the game but in reality she was playing in the room next to Ark’s. Her lack of experience wasn’t a problem since she could consult him anytime. Since Ark was the Lord of Lancel, having her there would be 100 times better than her being in a beginner village. Sapjil and Ulmeok immediately responded to Ark’s suggestion.

“Wow, Mother as the manager?”

“Great! Okay! Please accept it!”

So-mi thought for a while before smiling and nodding.

“Well, okay. I can also sell the things I made in the store. Sapjil, Ulmeok, please look after me well.”

“Yes!”

The pigs shouted with joy. Just like that the problem of Ark’s store manager was solved. Ark explained the basic operations of the store to So-mi. Then he told her proudly that he had become the Lord of Lancel. Although So-mi didn’t understand the details about the Lordship, she was satisfied as she confirmed the residents had a good impression of Ark.

"It seems you are doing well so I'm glad. Don't worry about the store and leave it to me."

Ark didn't mention that he was going to lead troops to recapture Silvana. Even if it was a game, his mother wouldn't like the thought of him going to war. Anyway, Ark solved the problem of the store manager with Somi's appearance and headed towards the square with the group. The troops that finished Bread's hell training had already gathered at the square.

'Okay, now there are no more problems.'

Ark looked around Lancel village. He had controlled all the work he needed to do as the Lord. Ark also left the person he trusted the most in charge of the store. Of course, the most important part of gathering the necessary troops still remained but everything else was finished.

"Okay, let's go!"

Ark shouted as he rode on Radun and pointed to Nagaran. At the same time, the 1,000 troops from Bristania under the command of Redian and the 2,000 troops under Shambala's command all departed towards Seutandal. Ark's expedition to reclaim Silvana had begun!

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".....?"

The old person who looked like a bull blinked his round eyes.

"W-what the, you?"

"What is it? Did you forget? Didn't I just meet you yesterday?"

"No, that's not it..... In just one day..... That is ridiculous!"

The old man waved his hand and shouted. The old man's reaction was natural. The old man had numerous scars from wounds on his face. The old man was actually a retired merchant. From his appearance it was



clear that he wasn't an ordinary merchant. He would even deceive a dragon if it meant delivering his package. This old man was called Kuronil. That's right. He was the legendary merchant who would run through dungeons, rampaging monsters or battlefields where there was a shower of arrows if it was for business. He was Kuronil. At the peak of his fame, people would say that 'he would catch a dragon if someone gave him money.' But that was already in the past. After becoming old, Kuronil had retired to the Hamong territory in Nagaran to reminisce on his old life. Even if he retired, he had built a manor with his money and lived without any worries but.....

Despite his brilliant life, Kuronil regretted one thing. As a young man, he had been too busy for a successor. So Kuronil started looking for a successor with experience and knowledge through the merchant's guild. Yesterday evening, one man visited with an introduction from the merchant's guild.

"I have to look at every candidate they send me....."

Kuronil cried out with petulance. Kuronil was looking for a certain type of merchant for my successor. However, the person who appeared with the letter of introduction had a physique where all his ribs were apparent.

"Why did they send me someone like him? Didn't I explain the minimum requirements to the merchant's guild? Did this guy really meet the criteria? Sheesh, it's obvious that there's some mistake. But I can't send him away as he has the letter of recommendation....."

Kuronil muttered in an irritated voice.

"I won't speak long words. Do you want to be my heir?"

"Yes."

"Sheesh, you're good at answering. Okay. The method to become my successor is easy. You just need to pass one test. There is a small cave near my house. You should find something inside the cave."

“Eh? It is that simple?”

“Simple?”

Kuronil laughed at the man's reaction.

‘Bah, you foolish fellow. If it is that simple then I would've already found a successor. I spent a great deal of money making the obstacles in that cave. So far dozens of people have tried it but they only ended up reaching halfway. Someone was stuck at the entrance for a month and cried when he came back. You will also come back crying.’

“Ahh, it is simple. Then go and see for yourself.”

Kuronil found it troublesome to explain so he just sent the man to the cave. And he deleted the man from his memory. He didn't think the man was worth worrying about. But the man he deleted from his memory had returned again.

‘What the, this guy? He's already given up? He must have no talent to abandon it so quickly.’

“The road to return is there.”

Kuronil didn't even bother talking and just pointed towards the city. The man tilted his head to one side and asked with confusion.

“Huh? Does it just end like this when I pass the test?”

“Pass the test? W-what are you saying?”

“Didn't I bring you the goods?”

“What, what the?”

Kuronil flinched and turned his head. The man flashed the item. It was a piggy bank. No, to be exact the item Kuronil stashed in the cave was the ‘Bold Golden Pigs.’ Kuronil looked at the gold pig with disbelieving eyes and grabbed the man's collar before shouting.

"H-how did you.....? This guy, what on earth did you do?"

"I just entered the examination room and took it out?"

"You just entered and took it out? Then the tests didn't work?"

"Tests? Did you mean the 3~4 strange wooden dolls? Well, I hit it and it broke. Ah, was I not allowed to do that?"

"It broke when you hit it?"

Kuronil couldn't understand so he ran towards the cave. The man's words were true. The remains of the smashed wooden dolls were scattered around the cave. The even more amazing thing was when the man rummaged through the remains of the doll.

"It's a pretty interesting toy. It was a little short so I feel a bit regretful....."

The man smacked his lips together with a regretful expression. Kuronil looked at the man blankly before he realized he didn't even know his name.

"W-who are you?"

"Me? I am called Isyuram."

The man grinned and replied. Yes, that person was Isyuram. Isyuram had received the quest after selling the stolen goods from the branch manager of the merchant's guild. The quest was to meet the legendary merchant Kuronil and become his heir. Isyuram was actually worried about completing the quest.

'Ark said it is likely to be a change profession quest so wouldn't it be really hard? If it is a merchant's profession quest then obviously it will deal with making money.....'

Isyuram was a level 300 merchant but he hadn't really engaged in business yet on his own. The fact that he managed to gain 11,028 gold as profit was just due to luck. If Isyuram had to do something like that

again then the quest would be impossible. But fortunately Kuronil's test was simple clearing a dungeon.

'I'm glad it isn't to do with trading but it is impossible for a change profession quest to be simple. Does a monster live in the cave? Sheesh, that won't be good.....'

If the quest required beating a boss monster then it would be too hard. It didn't matter if Isyuram was a level 300 or 400 merchant. It wasn't even easy for him to deal with general monsters alone. But an unexpected message appeared when Isyuram entered the cave.

-You have entered the Cave of Trials

The Cave of Trials is a place where the user's abilities are tested. When a challenger enters the Cave of Trials, all stats will be set at a certain amount and skills will be blocked. All weapons and armour will also be invalidated. You will have to depend on your techniques, senses and reflexes to pass the test. There is no time limit or restrictions on the amount of attempts. But if you die during the test then the death penalty will be applied. If you give up the challenge then your lost abilities will be restored.

\* Equipment dismantled, skills are blocked, the level is fixed and consumables are prohibited.

\* Strength, Agility, Stamina, Intelligence, Wisdom and Luck are fixed at 100.

'Eh? What is this?'

If other users saw that message then they would be unwilling. But after reading the information window, Isyuram cheered instead. All stats were fixed at 100 with the equipment and skills blocked. In other words, wasn't this the best conditions for Isyuram? In this condition, the only thing needed was the users' combat capabilities! And it was unnecessary to explain again but Isyuram's occupation was the captain of the police's SWAT team. His combat skills were top class!

‘I don’t understand, but if the test is like this then I have confidence!’

Isyuram jumped into the Cave of Trials without any hesitation. There was no need to explain after that. When he entered the pitch black cave, 3~4 wooden dolls instantly began attacking Isyuram. If an ordinary user had entered the cave then they would be turned into a bloody rag. But the opponent was Isyuram. He had experience fighting against dozens of gangsters in the darkness. Obviously he was capable of receiving the attacks in the Cave of Trials. No matter how realistic it was, New World was still a game. Even if he was stabbed with a sword, he wouldn’t really die. After experiencing real threats to his life, this degree of difficulty was only like a joke to him. No, it was even easier than when he fought against monsters with a merchant’s body.

‘What the? Why do they feel so weak?’

Since Isyuram was a merchant, the monsters wouldn’t receive a lot of damage even when he attacked the weak point. However, everybody who challenged the Cave of Trials was in the same state. In other words, Isyuram was able to deal as much damage as a warrior when he hit the wooden dolls. So Isyuram felt like the Cave of Trials was a lot easier than fighting monsters outside. In fact, Isyuram was totally unaware that dozens of merchants had challenged Kuronil’s test. But most of them gave up when they couldn’t even pass one checkpoint. To be honest, what normal user could pass the test where wooden dolls attacked in the darkness? Additionally, most users who chose a merchant had no experience in battle. So Kuronil’s test was impossible for merchants. That’s right. This was the reason why the quest had a difficulty of +A.

‘This is a good place to train the children.’

On the other hand, Isyuram was just thinking about the possibility of training there. It was natural. Even if it had a high level of difficulty, what SWAT team member wouldn’t be able to pass the test? Thanks to that, Isyuram passed all checkpoints and even destroyed the huge robot at the final checkpoint before grabbing the golden pig.

“Honestly, this test is really difficult for a merchant!”

Kuronil exclaimed after hearing Isyuram’s explanation. Then his attitude changed 180 degrees and he grabbed Isyuram’s hands.

“I’ve really despaired of the merchant’s these days. The merchants today are mistaken. A merchant is not a weak existence. We have to be strong to defend our property from the warriors. If the merchants are stronger than the warriors then we can maintain our money. That is the way of a real merchant taught to me by my master.....”

Kuronil started a heated lecture.

‘The way of a real merchant’, ‘following in the footsteps of the senior merchants’, ‘must be prepared to do things as a merchant’, ‘future of a merchant’ and so on. He found Kuronil’s chattering more difficult than the Cave of Trials. So 30 minutes passed like that.

“..... Now do you understand?”

When Kuronil’s lecture was over, an information window appeared in front of Isyuram.

-You have received information from the retired merchant Kuronil about a ‘Battle Merchant’.

Therefore you’ve earned the right to change to the dual profession ‘Battle Merchant.’

A dual profession is like a magic warrior or archer who has two attributes at the same time. Having two attributes halves the available skills but it has endless possibilities depending on the way it is utilized. In other words, it can be a great or incompetent profession depending on how it is raised.

A ‘Battle Merchant’ has the dual properties of a fighter and merchant. Thanks to the nature of the profession, a bonus won’t be applied to any business dealings unless it involves weapons or armour. Instead, it is possible to acquire battle skills unique to a Battle Merchant. When

hunting, the penalty to power will be reduced by 50%. However, a penalty of 50% will be applied to the experience received from the trading of goods instead.

Would you like to change your profession?

“Ooh!”

Isyuram felt completely refreshed after the boring lecture. Like Ark said, it was indeed a profession change quest. And it wasn't an ordinary profession but a dual profession! Isyuram's eyes lit up at the description for Battle Merchant. His gaze focused on the part where Isyuram could learn combat skills! In fact, Isyuram had recently been worried about New World.

‘Don't the battles become harder as the level increases?’

When the level rose then everything was stronger. It was natural since this was a trick of the game publishers. Anyone who played a game had experienced it. Hunting a level 1 and level 100 was completely different. It was common sense for hunting at level 1 to be more difficult. But in fact, hunting at level 100 was the more difficult experience. That's because the monsters became stronger as the level increased. The reason why users could fight against those monsters was because they received various skills and additional stats. But Isyuram was a merchant so even if his level increased, Isyuram would obtain any additional battle skills or stats. So he felt like he was actually becoming weaker as his level increased. It was the thing he was most doubtful about.

‘But now I can learn combat skills and the penalty has decreased by 50%.....!’

Of course, the merchant's ability decreased at the same time but he had no interest in business anyway. It wasn't a problem he had to think about.

“Change! Change!”

After Isyuram changed professions, a new skills list appeared. The combat skills and merchant skills were listed separately. After being in the game for 1 year, he had finally learnt some combat skills. Isyuram was impatient to test out the new skills. Then he suddenly remembered Ark's words.

"That's right! Isn't Ark also coming to Nagaran? Silvana is not that far away. It is good. Testing the combat skills on users is the best. I'll have to visit and tell him to add me to the siege. Huhuhu, just wait!"

So Isyuram ran like the wind towards Silvana.

### **Act 3: Dark Eden's Second Coming**

**[TL Note]** I've changed the skill proficiency levels to Beginner- Intermediate- Advanced- High Grade- Master. So the previous Master has been changed to High Grade. I've fixed the ones I found in previous chapters but please let me know if I've missed one.

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Thump, thump, thump, thump!

Isyuram ran as quick as lightning when he finished his profession change quest. The place he was running to had 1,000 troops marching. Since there was no flag or insignias, the large variety of people was a troop of users. But there was one person full of individuality. He was a black wolf moving on a large lizard at the head of the group! That's right. It was Ark who had transformed into Dark Wolf.

"You really gathered 1,000 troops in three days....."

Bread said as he looked at Ark.



"You don't understand the circumstances."

"What don't I understand?"

Ark laughed and remembered a few days ago.

"I'm sure a lot of people already know why I came here. This is New World. Like me, everybody is enthusiastic about the game. This is a large continent where you can go around freely and live with NPCs. But now some people are trying to mess up the balance of New World. We have to win against the people who want to steal what belongs to others!"

A few days ago, Ark had transformed himself into Dark Wold and shouted towards hundreds of users in Selebrid square.

"The damage right now might be minimal but if they become stronger than the users would no doubt suffer. I can't forgive them. As a player in New World, I can't afford to let the balance break. And that is not possible without your help. Please. Please help me!"

"Waaaaahhhh!"

"Dark Wolf is finally moving!"

"Okay, I will enter the war to protect New World's peace!"

The users gathered in the square cheered at Ark's speech ended.

'Huhuhu, it is a success!'

Ark looked at the supporters and laughed. But this reaction wasn't just because of Ark's fame. To be precise, it was the result of the work Ark implemented while he was in Lancel. Ark built his plan on gathering 1,000 users from Schudenberg but it wasn't 100% certain that he would succeed. Ark wasn't naive enough to think that users would unconditionally support him if he was famous. Of course, he had already secured 1,000 users from Bristania and 700 users from Seutandal. But to be correct, those users weren't supporting Ark. While they were influenced by Ark's fame, the users from Bristania gathered because of

Bread and Redian while the users from Seutandal followed because of JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members.

‘Redian and JusticeMan were friendly with the users for a long time which is how they were able to gather 1,700 users in a short period. But I’m in a different position. I can’t misunderstand. Dark Wolf might be famous but he has no connections.’

Ark clearly knew that. Besides, this battle was different from the Lancel defensive war. This time the bad guys weren’t attacking first. Therefore it could be considered an unnecessary battle. Even if he was famous, the users wouldn’t like it if he suddenly talked about fighting the Hermes guild. No, it was likely they would get a bad impression of him like they did Alan.

“He thinks he can do anything just because he appeared on TV?”

Ark assumed that he would sometimes hear things like that after becoming famous. This was what Ark was anxious about. Once they became famous, a celebrity would receive followers and jealousy at the same time. It was because of this that Alan was in an unrecoverable position after making one mistake.

‘It’s not as bad as Alan but I’ve reached a dangerous stage. If I use my fame too excessively then I won’t be able to gather enough troops.’

Moreover, the minimum level to fight against the Hermes guild was 250. Ark didn’t have a network of users so it wasn’t easy to gather 1,000 of them. So Ark seeded some plans when he became determined to retake Silvana. It started with the TV.

– (Voice Modulation) Lancel’s NPC: *The bad people attacked the village and my father died. They are really bad people. My father didn’t do anything wrong..... Sob sob sob.*

– (Voice Modulation) User who participated in the Lancel defensive war: *Ah, it really sucks. In fact, I had received a quest from the Haruna campsite. It was at 80% but the bandit group attacked and I ended up failing. From the*

*viewpoint of the person who was played with, I'm furious. But I'm not the only one who suffered from this in the game.*

The Dark Wolf broadcast on the game exclusive news was more like a documentary this time. The title was 'Wounds left by the Lancel Defensive War.' Ark went around Lancel and filmed NPCs and users who had been damaged by the war. In particular, the scene of a little NPC girl stirred the users' compassion. At the end of the broadcast, a scene of Dark Wolf muttering with a pained expression was shown.

"The battle is won but not everything has ended. No amount of compensation can heal the wounds of the residents and users. I can't forgive them. The ones who attacked the village are in jail but their ringleaders are still watching and laughing. As long as those guys are out there, it can happen to anyone!"

While the broadcast didn't specifically mention the Hermes guild, all the users who heard the rumours knew who Ark was referring to. Thus the users started blaming the Hermes alliance for the Lancel defensive war again. It was the reason why Ark produced the documentary. He suddenly became a celebrity so he was bound to receive jealousy. But if Ark gave them a clear enemy to hate then the situation would be different. Since then, the users' anger concentrated on the Hermes guild.

'Now it is an opportunity!'

Ark changed the feelings of jealousy to anger towards the Hermes alliance! Then he concentrated their sympathies on the NPCs in Lancel. It reached the point that merchants travelling to Giran and Selebrid spread rumours that the Hermes alliance was behind the bandit group. Thus the users supported Ark's idea to go and directly punish the Hermes alliance. The Hermes guild was thoroughly branded as evil both offline and online after Ark had increased the atmosphere of indignation.

'But that is not my only goal.'

That's right. There were two reasons why Ark spent all that time and effort. One was to avoid the jealous looks and create an atmosphere where troops can be collected. And the second reason was to isolate the Hermes alliance. Since Ark was gathering troops from Giran, the Hermes alliance would soon discover that Ark was planning to attack Silvana. Naturally the Hermes alliance would prepare its own forces.

'The Hermes alliance is pushed into a corner. They have to gain an overwhelming victory in this battle to show their power. So of course they would scrape into their funds.'

Then the competition of resources would start. No matter how bankrupt they were, the Hermes alliance would have to gather a lot more troops than Ark. Currently Ark had 4,300 users and NPCs. That was the limit. Meanwhile, the Hermes alliance exceeded 5,000 people. He was already inferior. Yet if the Hermes alliance added a few thousand more troops then they could definitely win.

'But this time the Hermes alliance has incurred the users' opposition!'

In such a situation, there were no players that would want to help the Hermes guild. They would be treated as villains if they sided with the Hermes guild. Of course, they could hire NPC mercenaries from Nagaran. While the mercenaries had good skills and abilities that could be taken advantage of in a siege, their employment cost was high compared to users.

'The Hermes alliance already has serious financial problems. While they could pay users for the help, the NPCs are risking their lives so they need more payment. With the Hermes alliance's limited funds, they can only hire a few hundred people at most.'

That was Ark's real purpose. After Ark manipulated the information and changed the users' jealousy towards anger at the Hermes alliance, he had limited the amount of troops they could hire. That's right. The siege warfare had already started before he even departed from Lancel village. Bread hadn't realized that and was really astonished.

"You really are fearful as an enemy."

"Then you should continue to be my friend."

"Why does that sound like a threat?"

"It is your imagination."

Ark showed his teeth and laughed. Then Racard who was sitting on his shoulders picked his nostrils and muttered.

"Che, by the way his is quite a boring place. Before it used to give off the sweet smell of blood while now it only smells like soil."

"Well, I don't know if it was good but the atmosphere has certainly changed."

Ark nodded and looked around. When he came to Nagaran in the past, there were countless battles taking place. But this time he couldn't even see a single battle. The number of guilds in Nagaran had also decreased. No, to be exact all the small guilds were absorbed into the alliances. In addition, the powers inside Nagaran were settled so there were no more small scale battles. In the past the Lordships used to change but recently there were almost no fluctuations. Despite there being 12 different castles in Nagaran, some Lordships changed once a month. And the 5 major powers in Nagaran had already occupied their estates for 1 year.

'And the Hermes alliance is one of those 5 powers. They are an alliance which has maintained the territory for more than 1 year. They might be weakened but they're not an easy opponent.'

"Can we really win?"

Roco asked anxiously. Ark looked at Roco before replying in a low voice.

"I have to win. No, I will win."

Then Roco looked at him and laughed.

“Oppa is wonderful in reality but he is even cooler in New World. The form of a wolf also isn’t bad.”

“Saying that all of a sudden.....”

“Hehehe.”

Roco laughed and folded her arms.

“Why are you saying that? There are other people as well.”

“What’s wrong? Bread oppa, are you envious?”

“Yes that’s right, I’m envious. Ah, I really want to see my lady Redian.”

Bread sighed and grumbled.

“Silvana castle!”

Then the voice of a scout could be heard from the hill ahead. Ark raised his head and exclaimed.

“Radun!”

Pa pa pa pa, pa pa pa pa!

Radun rushed forward at tremendous speed. Then a voice filled with emotion flowed out after he climbed the hill.

“Silvana!”

He looked at the territory spread out underneath him. It was Silvana, the estate he had left behind a long time ago! But the Silvana in front of him was different from what Ark remembered. The few buildings which used to be scattered along the farmland was much more diverse and widespread. Thanks to the long-term rule of the Hermes alliance, the territory had become stable. And in the centre of the territory was a huge castle! The size of the castle had doubled since Ark had been the Lord. The walls were much thicker and the various defense facilities

couldn't be compared to before. The castle's appearance gave off a dignified feeling these days.

'The castle changed to a C rating so naturally it would look different.'

Out of the 12 estates in Nagaran, only 5 had been promoted to a C rank. It was the 5 powers who controlled Nagaran. In other words, the alliance had to control the territory for at least 10 months before they could increase the rating. It was probably because they poured enormous amounts of money and time into developing the estate.

"The estate you developed..... I'll soon eat it with this body!"

Ark who had transformed into Dark Wolf murmured in a tone that really sounded like a wolf. Despite the atmosphere, he couldn't seize it first. Since he had gathered the troops faster than expected, there were still several days until the prearranged date of the siege. Bread who had also climbed the hill looked at the surroundings and said.

"The other troops still haven't arrived?"

"They contacted me just then and said they had just passed the border so they should arrive soon. Bread, please wait here and reorganize the troops when the support army arrives. In the meantime I'm going to visit Sid at the Continental Commerce Firm."

"Huhuhu, you came. Follow me."

Sid said as he walked forward. In fact Ark really didn't like his attitude. But he needed the hobbit's help so he had to endure the conceited attitude.

'Damn, he'll see after the siege ends!'

"Ark, welcome!"

Wolkosu and Lorenzo ran up to him as he arrived.

"I received word and was waiting for you. My decision has been made already."

Wolkosu grabbed Ark's hands and said. At one time he was just an NPC of a small store in Cairo and now he was the president of the Continental Commerce Firm in Nagaran. He was clearly promoted a few times more than Sid. However, the arrogance in the hobbit was completely absent from Wolkosu. Unlike a user who could easily change their attitudes, a NPC wouldn't easily change their attitude once there was a high degree of intimacy. Once again, that was the reason why he trusted NPCs more than users. But Ark didn't have time to enjoy the reunion with Wolkosu.

"Are the things I requested ready?"

"Of course, I used the full resources of the Continental Commerce Firm and only selected high quality products."

Wolkosu guided Ark to a warehouse. All the items he had requested were piled up like a mountain in the warehouse. Magic arrows and whetstones, scrolls, dolls etc. It was the necessary supplies for a siege.

"Thank you for the trouble."

Ark nodded as he scanned through the list of items.

"What are you saying? It is because of you that my son and I can live comfortably. I honestly wanted to give you these items for free. But I can't do that so I used my discretion to give you the good stuff."

"That will be enough."

Ark answered with a laugh. There was a reason Ark purchased the military supplies through Wolkosu. In New World, despite being the same price the items could have different performances. A typical example was the potions produced by the Seirun workshop in Ciel. Even though they were the same price, the Seirun potions healed approximately 100~150 more health than normal recovery potions. The same thing applied to the magic arrows and the whetstones. So he had used the vast information network of the Continental Commerce Firm and had them only buy the best goods. Moreover, Ark's store already did some wholesale dealings with the Continental Commerce Firm.



When he used the system of trading through the store, it was possible to buy the items for 30% cheaper.

‘But even so.....’

He sighed as he looked at the number at the bottom of the list. The price of the military supplies he ordered was 23,000 gold! 70% of his military funds had disappeared just from buying the military supplies. His heart really felt pained from paying such an astronomical amount.

‘This is only the beginning.’

Once again, this siege was a war for justice. If the siege succeeded then Ark could finally become the Lord of Silvana. If one person profited from the entire battle then there was bound to be complaints. So if the siege succeeded then he would have to pay a participation fee to the users.

‘Well that problem can be left until after I become the Lord.’

His head was already throbbing before he even won. But it didn’t matter. He was going to reclaim Silvana even if he had to die. Ark clenched his teeth tightly and paid the price for the military supplies.

“Here.”

“I hope you win.”

Ark received Wolkosu’s encouragement and exited the Continental Commerce Firm. After loading the goods onto a rental carriage, he returned to the campsite where several people ran towards him.

“Hahaha! Ark, hyung-nim has arrived!”

It was JusticeMan and the rehabilitation brothers.

“It’s been a while..... Hasn’t it?”

Redian who had also arrived at a similar time laughed and waved. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members also smiled and waved at

Shambala and Redian. They had already greeted each other so there was no need for Ark to introduce each of them. Ark suddenly flinched and looked around. He finally found Lariette among the rehabilitation members.

“Oppa, did your visit go well?”

When he looked at Lariette, Roco instantly ran out and grabbed his arm. Then Lariette looked at the couple scarves around Ark and Roco’s neck and smiled bitter sweetly before looking away. While Ark was puzzled by Lariette’s expression, Roco’s grip on his arm tightened. When he turned around, Roco’s expression seemed like she was close to tears.

‘There’s something wrong!’

Ark intuitively sensed. It was clear that something occurred between the two of them when he wasn’t here. What was it? Ark felt a strange sense of misgiving. In fact, Ark had carefully clarified his feelings before coming here. And his heart had already somewhat settled down. Ark thought his feelings for Lariette were one-sided so he had no problems organizing it. That’s why he thought about having a serious conversation with Lariette when he saw her. He wanted to get along with her so he didn’t want to become a cowardly type of person. If he told his feelings clearly then it could start unravelling and maybe newer, friendly feelings would begin. Ark carefully withdrew the arm that Roco had grabbed. However he didn’t head towards Lariette.

‘Someday..... But now’s not the time!’

Ark drew in a deep breath as he looked at the bottom of the hill. The 3,000 troops from Bristania and Seutandal were gathered underneath the hill. And the users Ark had gathered along with the Lancel troops numbered 1,300 people! That was a total of 4,300 people! That’s right. Now wasn’t the time to worry about feelings! He had to concentrate all his energies on recapturing Silvana.

“Bread, is the organization of the troops finished?”

“Huh? Ah yes, I’ve divided the troops according to their specialities. Now all we have to do it register the troops.”

Bread replied with surprise as he had noticed the subtle atmosphere.

“Okay, then I’ll go finish the registration as quickly as possible.”

Despite gathering 4,300 people, they weren’t a guild so they could only register as units. In order to register, Ark had divided the troops into 20 units. Now the only thing left was to send a declaration of war to the Hermes guild! Ark headed towards the Shrine of War with a determined expression.

“I have to go.....”

Sid approached and suddenly said.

“What are you talking about? You came all the way here and now you want to leave?”

“That’s what I said. Like Ark-nim knows, I am a person who runs business deals here. If I participate in the battle and the Hermes alliance wins then it will be difficult for me to do business with them.”

“What the, what are you saying?” Wasn’t I the one who got you that position?”

“Ah I don’t know. I’m a businessman so I have to consider these options. If I can’t engage in business here anymore then Ark-nim will also be troubled. It will all be in vain if I have to leave the Continental Commerce Firm.”

‘This brat really.....!’

Fire burned in Ark’s eyes at Sid’s words. But was anything Sid said wrong? Ark pouted his lips. He really wanted to beat up that face. However he couldn’t say that his words were wrong. During a siege, there was quite a few things for merchants to do including managing the supplies. The reason Ark hadn’t recruited any merchants

was because he had thought of entrusting the work to Sid. But if he suddenly withdrew then how could he get a merchant to replace him? No, why didn't he mention it before when they were talking about the siege?

'I can't stand it anymore!'

Ark's patience towards Sid's impertinence suddenly broke. Just as he was about to start his mental training.

"Ark!"

When he turned around, someone was running towards the hill at a tremendous speed. Ark's face became astonished as he saw the face of the person rapidly approaching.

"Eh? Teacher?"

"Huk huk huk, I feel like dying. Anyway, I'm glad I'm not too late."

The person who appeared like the wind was Isyuram. Ark looked at him with a bewildered expression and asked.

"What is going on? Weren't you going to Hamong castle? Did you fail?"

Even if the profession change quest is short, it should still take longer than a week. Isyuram had started four days before Ark but he had used the Letter Movement so it should've only taken him two days to reach Hamong. Since there was a magic tower in both cities then it made no sense to walk to Selebrid from Giran. The only thing he could think was that Isyuram had abandoned the quest when he failed and headed towards Silvana. But Isyuram just laughed with a proud expression.

"Fail? Huhuhu, there is no way I can fail. I already finished it."

"Already? Then it wasn't a profession change quest?"

"It was."

"Huh? Then you completed a profession change quest in a few days?"

"It took one day in game time so to be exact it was 8 hours."

Isyuram arrogantly stretched his neck and said.

"Frankly, it was the most interesting quest I've done in the entire time I've played the game."

Isyuram proudly tried to explain the quest contents. Then JusticeMan approached and interrupted.

"Ark, who is this? You called him Teacher....."

"Ah, is this the first time you've seen him?"

When Ark tried to explain, Isyuram hurriedly jumped and blocked Ark's mouth. He studied JusticeMan's face before whispering in a low voice.

"I-idiot. Have you forgotten that I've currently a part of an infiltration investigation?"

"Huh? But....."

"No. The investigation still hasn't ended. If a lot of people know my character's name then how can I investigate later? I'll explain it to Gwon hyung-nim later so let's just leave it for the moment."

Like Isyuram said, it wasn't a good time to explain everything. Ark nodded and said.

"This person is my teacher from my previous taekwondo school.

"I am called Isyuram."

Isyuram carefully introduced himself.

"But why did you come here?"

"Oh, you told me that you were heading towards Nagaran for a war. I came to participate."

“Huh? But you’re a merchant.”

“That’s right. However I’m no longer an ordinary merchant. I’m.....”

Isyuram who was smiling slowly narrowed his eyes. He saw Sid and gazed at him for a while. Sid also tilted his head to one side as he became interested in Isyuram. Then the two people shouted at the same time.

“Ah! You’re the hobbit who cheated me in Giran!”

“Ah! You’re that stupid person who I scammed in Giran..... Hik!”

Sid screamed before he freaked out and shut his mouth. That’s right. Sid and Isyuram had met once a long time ago. Isyuram had saved Sid from some monsters. But Sid forgot the favour and scammed Isyuram before running away. Thanks to that, Isyuram hadn’t been able to sleep well because of his resentment. Isyuram’s face became dark as he remembered the past.

“Huhuhu, to meet an old enemy like this after such a long time. When I think about everything I suffered from your scam.....”

“What are you saying? Do you know Sid?”

“What? You know that hobbit?”

“Huh? That.....”

Ark was about to reply when he noticed the strange atmosphere. Sid who had slowly turned pale looked horror stricken and ran away. No, he tried to run away. Isyuram’s hand shot out and grabbed Sid. He dragged Sid back and said to Ark.

“Let’s talk later after I take care of some business.”

“Hik, Ark-nim, save me!”

Sid struggled and screamed. However Ark just looked at a distant mountain and pretended ignorance.

'I don't know what happened but judging from Sid's expression, he is definitely the one who made the mistake.'

Even if that wasn't the case, he had just been about to re-educate Sid. There was no reason for him to stop it and help Sid.

"Hey, you....."

"Leave it. Teacher isn't the type to do things without a reason. He must've been truly wronged by Sid."

Ark stood in front of the rehabilitation members who had tried to interrupt. Then Sid shouted in a tearful voice.

"I was wrong! I admit it so please save me! I didn't collect even 1 copper of the money I cheated from him! Do you remember the Unicorn's Horn? I ended up paying that money to Ark!"

"Let's see? Do I remember something like that?"

Ark pretended ignorance and turned his back to Sid. Sid opened his mouth to say something else but he was dragged into a dark place. Sid's ensuing scream of distress echoed throughout the place.

"Aaaaaaack!"

Sid's screams were like music to the annoyed Ark.

"Ark, are you just going to leave it like this? Well, I don't know what's going on."

JusticeMan murmured in a concerned voice.

"Yes, I suppose I'll end it here."

Ark smiled and walked towards the site of the violence. When he entered a place surrounded by thick bushes and rocks, he could see Isyuram instantly. But he couldn't see Sid at all. Sid had been so beaten up by Isyuram then he resembled a bloody lifeform. When Ark

appeared, Sid who had been like a corpse got up and grabbed the hem of his pants.

"Sob sob sob. Ark-nim, save me! That person isn't human!"

"What? This bastard.....!"

"Hik. S-s-save me!"

Ark looked at Sid and sighed before saying.

"I don't know what happened but Teacher won't stop without my orders. Well, it would be different if a merchant who was in charge of the military supplies died. Isn't that right?"

Sid withered up as he figured out the answer Ark wanted. Then he frantically nodded and replied.

"Yes, yes, I'll do it! I'll do whatever you want! I'll work hard!"

"Damn, it can't be helped."

Isyuram glared at Sid lying on the ground and said.

"You seem important to Ark this time so I'll leave it like this for now. But be wary. If I notice you doing anything else bad then it won't end like this. I'll chase you to the end of hell! Do you understand?"

"Yes yes, I'll keep it in mind!"

Sid trembled while lying on the ground as he replied. Ark thought that Sid's reaction was slightly exaggerated. Even if he had been hit for 10 minutes, this was just a game. Well, his appearance was so horrible that he looked like a zombie but Sid would only feel the pain as static electricity. Why was he making such a fuss over something like that? But there was something Ark didn't know about Isyuram. Recently Isyuram started to realize he was different from other users. When Isyuram broke his arm then he really felt it but other users didn't feel that pain. He just couldn't understand why there were such differences. Anyway, when dealing with users Isyuram always hit the vital spots since it could still



cause them a large pain. If he did that as a member of the SWAT team then people would complain that Isyuram was abusing his power. Humans couldn't stand the pain of having their vital spots hit, but since the users only felt a static shock then it wasn't like he was torturing them.

'Anyway, thanks to him the trouble of re-educating Sid is over.'

Ark smirked as he looked at Sid.

"To go so far.....!"

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members' eyes widened as they saw Sid's state. Thus Isyuram planted an intense impression in the people of Ark's group.

"Now I'm going to the Shrine of War to apply for the siege."

Ark headed towards the Shrine of War like nothing was wrong.

"I came to apply for participation in the siege."

"Then please fill out this information first."

\* Corps: <Dark Eden>

\*Corps Leader <Ark>

\*Commander: <JusticeMan>

\*Number of Personnel: <4,276>

It was the rebirth of Dark Eden. After following the instructions of the priest to enter the information, a new information window popped up.

-You have completed the application for participation in the siege at the Shrine of War.

Currently <Dark Eden> is the no.1 applicant for the siege. After your forces has applied for participation in the siege, Nagaran is now

declared a neutral zone were the enemy can't attack you until the siege is over.

\* Remaining time until the siege starts is 47 hours.

"It has been registered."

The priest nodded and said.

"I'll confirm it once again. Currently the group which has applied for the siege is Dark Eden. There is a redundancy date of one week before the next siege. If you don't have the number of forces you applied to the siege for then you can adjust the date once. If all your preparations are finished, are you ready to begin the siege on the next date?"

"I will participate on this date."

In fact, it was possible to stall the siege schedule. Although he already had 4,000 troops gathered, it wasn't like that for a lot of guilds. The number of warriors, archers and magicians had to be carefully selected with the appropriate levels so some guilds took a while selecting their troops. However time was money to Ark. Just training the 4,000 people would consume Ark's money.

'I can't afford that now. My remaining money is only 7,000 gold. That is about a week's worth of meals. If I make them train then it is only 3~4 days. The only possibility is trying the siege in two days.'

Having thousands of troops really wasn't a joke. Just the cost of the food alone would waste thousands of gold. After he finished the registration and returned to the campsite which was declared a neutral zone, he spoke to his troops.

"I've completed the final registration. We will destroy those villains two days later at noon. Until then it is necessary that everyone trains for the siege. Although there isn't much time left so I know it is difficult, I expect you to listen to the instructions of your unit commander."

"Understood!"

“Now you know what you’re supposed to be doing. Please give it your all.”

Ark entrusted the training of the reborn Dark Eden to the unit commanders. There wasn’t much time left but under the hands of experienced people like Bread, Redian, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members, he was sure that they could raise the users to a certain level. No, he had to believe that.

“What about you?”

“I’ve got other work to do.”

Ark looked at the huge pile of ingredients at the campsite. Whether it was reality or a game, the portion of food required for a war was the same. In reality hungry soldiers couldn’t exert their strength while in New World, their stats would fall if satiety was low. If they moved a lot then it was natural for satiety to fall quickly. In the end, the food required for 4,000 people after two days would reach the tens of thousands.

‘Thankfully I can get some of it back by selling cheap military provisions at the Shrine of War.’

He had secured enough food already so satiety wasn’t a problem. But the reason Ark bought thousands of ingredients wasn’t just to create food they could eat. There was a meaning to Ark’s food other than raising satiety.

‘From now on I will create survival cooking dishes with these ingredients!’

That’s right. It was his survival cooking which increased stats. In this siege, his numbers and organization abilities of his troops were inferior from the start. While he couldn’t assume that survival cooking would have an absolute effect, wouldn’t it increase their chances? His Survival Cooking skill had reached a High Grade proficiency so he could expect a considerable rise in stats. Of course, actually making the survival cooking dishes wasn’t an easy task. The siege lasted for 24 hours. He

would have to provide each person with 3~4 dishes for it to show an effect. 2~3 dishes for 4,000 people meant he needed to cook between 8,000~12,000 dishes. He needed to create 8,000~12,000 dishes in two days!

‘I’ll make it even if I have to stay up all night!’

Ark pulled out his pot with fiery eyes. And the desperate struggle of Ark had begun.

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“That Ark bastard.....!”

A man muttered in the darkness. The man with dark circles under his eyes was Raiden the Hermes guild leader. Raiden hadn’t been able to sleep properly for the last week. Needless to say the reason was the suicide squad’s failure to attack Lancel. The secret society had been organized to resolve the Hermes alliance’s serious financial problems. But the organization had been shattered and their faces broadcast on TV, causing the Hermes alliance’s crisis to worsen. No matter how much Raiden denied his association with the secret society, it was ineffective. All the previous friendly guilds had turned their backs to the Hermes alliance and thousands of people were writing all kinds of stories about them on the forums. But there was even more. From the beginning the Hermes alliance had hunted together. The Hermes alliance which was one of the 5 powers in Nagaran had suddenly become villains. But the really serious problem was the general users. In fact, only Raiden and a few members knew that he had organized the secret society. The general users hadn’t known about it. Yet they were suddenly painted as bad guys overnight when they didn’t even do anything. Therefore quite a few members had withdrawn from the alliance.

“I’ve managed to somehow stop the talk but there is a time limit. If there is a rebellion then I won’t be able to hold on. I have to regain the alliance’s stability no matter what!”

The trouble wasn't just the troops decreasing from the members withdrawing. While the Hermes alliance was being labelled as villains in the public opinion, their financial struggles were still an internal problem. That was why none of the other powers had challenged them yet. However, if more people withdrew then it would be difficult to conceal the internal affairs. Then they would jump on the Hermes alliance like hyenas. The Hermes alliance that was struggling from financial difficulties would die. That's right. The reason why he invested so much money into the defences of his castle and the number of troops was a desperate measure to avoid a siege. In other words, it was a siege deterrent. He would lose a huge amount of money whether he won or lost the siege.

"I have to prevent that situation no matter what. Those hyenas absolutely can't know that we are having financial difficulties. If Silvana is taken away then we will lose our only source of income....."

The Hermes alliance would collapse. And the method for Raiden to return the 20,000 gold he borrowed would disappear. The loan sharks would visit his house every day and his wife would take the children back to her parents' house. He would become penniless overnight. The problem of defending Silvana was linked with the problem of defending his home for Raiden.

"I'll have to drink a bit of alcohol with the Silver Gate and Noel guild leaders while asking them to manage their guilds. Since they are the largest guilds in the alliance, if they hold firm then the unrest should stop for the moment. Damn, the people are calling every day for my debts while I have to worry about managing the guild....."

When he thought about it, it really was pitiful.

"Lord-nim!"

Then the doors suddenly opened and one of the alliance members ran in. The member gasped for breath and shouted.

"It is serious!"

“Serious? What? What’s going on? Is there another withdrawal?”

“Withdrawal? No, that’s not it..... Someone from the Shrine of War just got in touch with us. Somebody has applied for a siege two days later!”

“What? A siege?”

Raiden felt his heart fall.

‘Damn, we’re already struggling for breath and now someone has applied for a siege? Has our financial difficulties already leaked? I’m screwed. Then I will have to continue paying for sieges in the future.....’

“Who are they? What alliance applied for the siege?”

“It’s not an alliance but an attack corps called Dark Eden.”

“Dark Eden?”

Raiden’s mind flashed white the moment he heard the name Dark Eden.

‘Dark Eden is the name of the attack group Ark organized before.....  
He finally came!’

As expected, Raiden already knew that Ark was gathering troops. However, he didn’t want to believe that Ark was going to attack Silvana. Indeed, he only knew that Ark had gathered 1,000 users from Giran and Selebrid. Raiden couldn’t possibly know about Ark’s movements in Bristania and Seutandal. However, Ark’s troops had suddenly swelled to 4,000 people when he applied for the siege. Dozens of thoughts passed through Raiden’s head after he heard the number of people in Dark Eden.

“Where did he get the rest of the 3,000 people from? How did this guy who has no union manage to gain enough funds to gather that many troops? No, it doesn’t matter right now. That Ark bastard, he couldn’t even let me catch my breath before cornering me in a difficult situation. Does he want me to be homeless?”

Anger welled up in Raiden’s heart.

“Dammit, I will never hand Silvana over to him!”

Raiden shook the table sharply and shrieked. At that moment Raiden came up with an idea.

“Wait, maybe..... This might actually be a chance.”

It wasn't necessary to say again but the reason Hermes had become like this was because of Dark Wolf. Now Ark had applied for a siege without even letting the Hermes alliance recover from their troubles. No doubt he was the cause of the Hermes alliance's crisis! But if the Hermes alliance managed to fend off Ark's attack then wouldn't it show their overwhelming power? It was possible to give a good impression of the Hermes alliance to the large number of users watching Silvana. And Ark's fame would have no choice but to fall.

“And despite the current situation, all the alliance members have a grudge against Ark. If they join forces to crush Ark's group then the unity of the alliance will increase again. Yes, this is definitely an opportunity. It'll be the end if we lose but if we win then it is an opportunity to save the alliance from a crisis!”

Raiden considered it before shouting.

“Give an order for all alliance members to gather! Scrape together all the alliance's remaining funds!”

Raiden stopped for a moment before speaking in a cold voice.

“Our enemy is.....Ark!”

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In the meantime, it was 4 hours until the decisive battle. Soon the battle between Dark Eden and the Hermes alliance would begin, no the siege was a battle where Ark and Raiden's life was at stake. It was the eve of the decisive battle! An ordinary user would be looking at the castle to

renew their determination. But Ark couldn't afford the time to create a cool atmosphere.

"Ohhhhhh!"

Ark had been rocking his pot like crazy for the past two days without a break. Making sure the meat wasn't too strong or rare, adding salt and pepper with suitable timing, Ark repeated similar actions thousands of times like a robot to cook some dishes. Now just the smell of food felt like torture to him. Then after a while, an information window suddenly appeared.

-The survival cooking dish 'Sweet Muko's Steak' has been completed.

This Muko steak is a dish made with high quality ingredients. The excellent skill of the chef has ensured that the meat has the golden ratio so it has the final taste.

<For 30 minutes, Strength +20 and maximum health +300>

"Huk huk huk, it is done!"

Ark looked at the massive amounts of dishes piled up with a pale face. He hadn't slept for two days while cooking like crazy. After learning survival cooking, this was the first time he had made so many dishes in such a short time period. He had cooked so many dishes that he often had to force his consciousness back after it drifted off. He had a new respect for the Koreans who cooked a feast of food for their relatives every holiday. Anyway, Ark had accomplished his purpose. The number of steaks and pan-fried food piled up was 8,000 dishes!

"Despite the difficulties..... It was worthwhile!"

Now he could distribute two dishes each to each member of his troops. But that wasn't the only good thing from his cooking frenzy. After cooking so many dishes for the last two days, his Survival Cooking skill had risen from High Grade to a Master proficiency.



-After studying the ingredients deeply, the rating of 'Survival Cooking' has risen.

Survival Cooking (Master, Passive): Thanks to your tireless passion, you have finally reached the Master level.

As a master, you have nothing more to learn in this field. After learning all types of styles of cooking and working with different ingredients, no dish is impossible for you anymore. There had been no Masters in New World until now. Thanks to your mastery of survival cooking, you can now cook 'Creative Dishes.'

\* Creative Cooking: Even though you have become a Master, it is just the beginning of a new challenge.

With Creative Cooking, there are no wrong combinations of ingredients and combination dishes can be created which never existed before. In this sense, Creative Cooking gives a special effect to normal dishes. Dishes created from Creative Cooking can be said to be 'not just for eating.' In addition, there is a legend on the continent that Creative Cooking can create the 'ultimate' dish.

<It is possible to use Creative Cooking to cook dishes with mysterious effects>

It was his first skill which reached Master level in New World! After he became a Master, his speed at creating dishes became incredibly fast. That was how he was able to create 8,000 dishes in two days.

"There hasn't been a lot of time to test it thoroughly but the Creative Dishes is also beyond my expectations!"

After testing, Ark determined that Creative Cooking was like making special items. All the dishes created with Creative Cooking had an odd effect and they could also be food that didn't have to be eaten. And it was the food which wouldn't be eaten that Ark was interested in. The reason for this was because he could create dishes with ingredients he couldn't utilize before. And it possessed an effect that couldn't be imagined for normal dishes. For example, there were a few dishes that

would cause a dangerous explosion which mixed with other food. When mixed with rotten food, it was possible to create a poisonous mist. He was able to create dishes that was like attack magic potions. The magic potions were useful in battle because they had no cool down time but it was too expensive and bulky for regular users. Ark was the same as well. However he could create a similar effect thanks to Creative Cooking. Of course, Creative Cooking couldn't unleash the same havoc as magic potions. And cooking it required more time and it couldn't possibly be sold at general stores..... No, to be exact strange ingredients were needed for it. But its strong point was that it was 70% cheaper than the magic potions.

"Moreover most users already knew the effects of the magic potion. But Creative Cooking creates effects that were different from the magic potions. Even the users who grasped all the effects of the magic potion would panic from the attacks of the Creative Dishes. I only know about 10 types of dishes at the moment but the recipes will increase and the ways to utilize the dishes will be endless!"

Hard work would be rewarded with growth. That was one of the ironclad rules of online games.

"That's it. Now everything is ready!"

Ark put the pot away after finishing with his cooking. When he checked, the remaining time until the siege was 3 hours. There was time for a short break. After struggling to create the mountain of dishes, Ark finally looked at Silvana castle. When he raised his hands in front of him, it was like the light of Silvana was in the palm of his hand.

"After tomorrow you will be mine."

Ark murmured as he made a tight fist. How much time had passed? Finally the light from the sun started to rise on the horizon. Then there was flashing lights as the troops connected one after the other. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members, Lariette, Roco, Bread, Redian and all the members of Dark Eden were accounted for. When he

looked at them, he could sense that they had just woken up. Ark stood up and shouted.

“Let’s go!”

#### **Act 4: Opening of the Siege**

“It looks even more absurd close up.”

Ark had arrived in front of the castle while leading the 4,300 troops. He had thought Silvana castle was great when he saw it from a distance. But it was unbelievable when he saw it close up. The castle walls was so high and thick that it looked like a rock wall and the steel on it made it seem like one giant shield. It was an overwhelming sight.

‘But it isn’t my opponent!’

Ark looked at the soldiers lined up on the wall. That’s right. Ark’s opponent wasn’t the wall. It was the members of the Hermes alliance!

“Racard.”

Ark murmured in a low voice. Then a bat flew out of the sky onto Ark’s shoulder. It was Racard.

“Have you figured out all the movements of the Hermes troops?”

“Huhuhu, nobody can avoid my eyes.”

Racard declared with an arrogant expression and explained.

“Yesterday evening 5,600 troops gathered in the castle. Today at dawn 1,400 people were divided between the left with right Defense Towers, with each one receiving 700 people each. 1,000 people were left in the castle while the remaining 3,200 people were stationed at the front.”

In a siege, the system was that the defending side couldn't help having the advantage. The reason for that wasn't just the high walls and Defense Towers. The biggest advantage between the challenger and the defenders was the 'tactics' range. When the siege started, as the challenger Dark Eden would have no choice but to gather in front of the castle. And they could only move the troops after the siege started. Therefore the troops on the walls could see where Dark Eden would move its troops. But the Hermes alliance would've already deployed the troops and with the high walls, there was no way to determine accurately the deployment. So Ark had used Racard to reveal the Hermes alliance's cards. There was no need to explain why. Thus two days ago Ark had ordered Racard to watch the castle using satellite surveillance mode. It was in order to catch the movements of the Hermes alliance.

"Have you confirmed who is commanding the troops outside?"

"Yes I saw it. She is the leader of the Silver Gate guild called Gwen."

Racard replied after recalling his memory. Ark had fought with the Hermes alliance before in the siege. Because of that Racard could remember the main guilds which belonged to the alliance.

'If Gwen is leading the attack then is Raiden hiding inside the castle?'

The siege warfare was a battle to take control of the throne. Obviously the alliance would have some users to protect the throne.

"And the arrangement outside the castle?"

"Look at this."

Racard took out a few memo papers. He had roughly drawn the symbols for 'Ma' and 'Jeon' on it, so the symbols were recorded like they were a code. Racard had used satellite surveillance mode for two days and completely grasped the movements of the troops. 'Ma: 50 ' meant that there were 50 magicians, while 'Jeon: 200 meant there were 200 warriors. Thus Ark was able to 100% identify the complete movements of the Hermes troops.

“Hehehe, didn’t I do well? Shouldn’t it be sufficient for 200 points?”

Racard murmured as he twisted his hands together.

“This will be worth 150 points.”

“Eh eh? But.....”

“But if you continue to monitor the enemy’s movements and report it to me then I will give you another 150 points.”

“Eh! R-really? Then I can finally.....!”

Racard looked at the scarf and gloves Ark was wearing with longing eyes. Racard had been watching the enemy for two chilly days but he hadn’t complained in order to earn points. Previously his pets had worked so hard to buy the equipment but they had only earned around 100 points by the time they had to leave Lancel. At the time Ark had taken out the gloves and scarves he received from So-mi and said.

“If you reach 400 points then I will give you these winter equipment.”

“Ooh!”

His pets’ eyes popped out. In fact, his summons had thought they would only be given one shabby coat after scraping together 400 points. Yet Ark was showing them gloves and scarves made of the finest wool! In addition, each set also had a different embroidered design of a bat, a skeleton and a snake.

“You guys only have 100 points. You’re also leaving Lancel so you can’t do any business anymore. But the weather is getting colder so if you earn 300 points during the siege then I will 100% give you these high quality equipment.”

That was the reason why Racard wasn’t complaining.

‘Once my pets also have a goal then they listen well.’

Ark looked down at the papers Racard had written on and laughed. Then a horn sounded from the Shrine of War and a NPC's voice was heard.

"I now declare this the siege area! Aside from the people participating in the siege, nobody can approach this area until the siege ends!"

Ku ku ku ku, kong!

Then a huge hourglass started rotating slowly. It was the hourglass which indicated the 24 hours of the siege. Once all the sand had fallen down, either Ark or Raiden would be the winner.

'It's started!'

Ark simultaneously summoned the leaders of his group. JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members, Shambala, Bread, Redian, Lariette and Roco. The core power of Dark Eden was gathered in one place. However, the result Ark quickly summoned them wasn't to consult about the strategies. The strategy he had determined to recapture Silvana had replayed in his mind hundreds and thousands of times. There was no reason for him to discuss it now.

'But it is necessary to change something because of the placement of the Hermes troops.'

"I've confirmed that there are 700 people stationed in each Defense Tower."

JusticeMan scratched his beard and murmured.

"Does that mean they have a surplus of troops?"

"No, they have no intention of having a full-fledged war with us."

Ark took out Racard's memos and explained it.

"If you look at their configuration, most of the magicians and archers are placed along the wall as well as the warriors. They will concentrate on defending the wall."

It was a basic tactic in a siege to place archers and magicians along the walls while the warriors were stationed behind the gate. Depending on the circumstances, they could come out to inflict a counterattack.

Suddenly running out of the gates and attacking before running back in was a fairly stressful tactic. However, the Hermes alliance had arranged their warriors along the walls. And there were quite a few troops in the Defense Towers. It meant they intended to defend the walls rather than a full-fledged battle. There was a reason the Hermes alliance selected this method. The Hermes alliance wanted to avoid the financial cost of a war of attrition. If Hermes concentrated on defending then it would be difficult for Dark Eden to win.

‘The Hermes alliance is using the tactic of hiding behind the castle wall like turtles. If I want to win then I’ll have to either climb over the walls or go through the gate. But our numbers are inferior so we’ll just receive damage if we attack like that.’

In order to break the gate they had to remove a Defense Tower. The Defense Tower raised the defense of the walls and gate and healed their durability. So it wasn’t an exaggeration to say that the Defense Tower was the key between victory and defeat. If they couldn’t remove the Defense Towers then not even siege weapons could destroy the gate.

‘Then isn’t it obvious that there are considerable defences around the towers?’

For example, Alan’s method of burying traps and using long ranged attacks was a common tactic. The Hermes alliance would also use the same tactics.

‘In order for a siege to be successfully, I will have to enter the castle within 18 hours. When considering the time it takes to capture the gates, I need to take control of the Defense Towers in 14 hours. But 700 people are deployed there so I will have to send at least 1,000 troops to capture it within 14 hours. That was a total of 2,000 people. If I do that then I’ll only have 2,300 troops left.’

The Hermes alliance had 3,200 troops deployed outside. Since they controlled the castle, it was possible for them to exit and attack the main forces at any time. Looking at their arrangement, the Hermes alliance had no intention of coming out but that would change if Ark only had 2,300 troops left after sending people to capture the Defense Towers. Even the ones inside the castle would come out and attack. Then it would be a battle of 4,200 vs. 2,300 people.

‘It is difficult. There should be at least 3,000 people remaining in the main force. Then I can only send 500 people to the Defense Towers. With that number I absolutely can’t capture the Defense Towers in the time limit.’

In this situation it wasn’t possible. They had already run into a wall at the start of the guild. However.....

“It does not matter. Because it isn’t necessary for us to smash the Defense Towers.”

Ark replied with a wicked grin. JusticeMan also nodded and said.

“That’s right.”

Like Ark said, the Defense Towers was very important when building a strategy. But he had no intention of removing the Defense Towers. No, it would actually be a problem if the Defense Towers were removed. Ark looked at Bread and Redian before saying.

“Bread, Redian, I want you guys to lead 500 troops to the Defense Towers but do you understand? You can attack the enemy but you can’t attack the Defense Towers. You should pretend to attack of course, but concentrating on decreasing their numbers.”

“Okay.”

So Bread and Redian made their way to the Defense Towers. Ark opened his mouth again after they left.



“You already roughly know my strategy for this siege. Security is the most important thing in this mission. If those guys notice then this plan will 100% fail. Each unit has to move as planned without violating any orders. When leading the unit, don’t let them know the contents of the plan until the last moment!”

“Ooh!”

Ark grabbed the hands of the leaders and shouted powerfully. Then he turned his body and shouted towards the soldiers.

“Now, let’s begin the attack! 1st siege weapons unit!”

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

At the same time, some catapults moved forward slowly. It was the catapults Ark had asked the raccoons to make.

“Concentrate all attacks on the gate!”

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“Ridiculous.”

On the walls outside Silvana castle. The commander called Gwen snorted as she looked at the catapults.

“They expect to attack a castle protected by C ranked Defense Towers using 10 catapults?”

The siege weapons played a huge role in a siege. It was almost impossible to break the walls and gate of a castle using general weapons. Of course, if they attacked the gate for a while it was bound to break but attacks would also be pouring down from above. They could only break down the gates when they were already close to destruction. Thus a siege weapon was needed. The siege weapons did 200% more damage to the gate than normal attacks. But the siege weapons had a fatal weakness. They couldn’t move freely because of

their weight. While the siege weapons had a longer range than magic or arrows, the opponents could still attack it from the walls. Therefore 40 catapults were usually needed in a siege. The catapults could be set up in a rotation, with damage catapults being swapped to repair the damage. But Ark had only prepared 10 catapults. It would be impossible to do much damage to the walls before the catapults were destroyed.

“You fool, you know how important siege weapons are. Is it a lack of money? Anyway, we seem to have overestimated Ark too much. Use full force to intercept the catapults!”

Arrows and magic was fired from the walls after Gwen gave the order. Hundreds of magic and arrow was concentrated on one catapult. No matter the endurance of the catapult, it would be destroyed instantly from the concentrated attacks! But.....

“Huh? What the?”

“What? Aren’t those siege weapons far away?”

The soldiers buzzed with confusion. The magic and arrows couldn’t reach the catapults and just fell. Hadn’t the catapults come into range yet? That was the opponents’ thoughts but the catapults were already firing rocks at the gates.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

“What is this? Isn’t the range of a catapult similar to magic and arrows? Then how could a catapult that is outside the 10 metres range attack the gate?

Gwen looked at the catapult with a confused face. The only thing she could think of was that Ark’s catapults had a longer range.

“Is that the reason he only mobilized 10 catapults? Good but.....”

Gwen smiled and raised her fist. The several soldiers peeled off the tents placed here and there.

“Huhuhu, it’s not an accident that we’ve maintained this estate for 1 year. This Silvana isn’t the old Silvana. It is a military fortress!”

Gwen murmured as the massive object hidden by the tent appeared. The thing inside the tent was a catapult! No, they were 10 gun turrets fixed on the walls. The gun turrets were the Hermes alliance’s anti-siege weapons! No matter how long the range of Ark’s catapults, with the turrets on the walls then the attack had no chance of hitting. And the projectiles shot out by the turrets wasn’t simple rocks. They boasted tremendous explosive power!

‘The bombs are expensive so I didn’t’ really want to use them but I have no choice.’

“Launch! Attack their siege weapons!”

Tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

Bombs were simultaneously launched by 10 gun turrets. The bombs fell in a big parabola towards enemy lines.

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk! Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Suddenly a huge number of fire arrows were shot from the catapults. They flew up hundreds of metres to impact with the bombs, causing them to explode in thin air. Gwen looked at the catapults with stupid eyes. At the same time, two carriages appeared on either side of the catapult. It was a machine with dozens of holes on the top like a honeycomb with smoke gushing out of it.

“What the, that is?”

Gwen muttered in a stupid voice. Then the carriages turned towards Gwen’s direction. At the same time, dozens of flaming arrows went flying out of the hole. They were giant arrows 10 times larger than crossbow arrows.

“Huck! S-scatter!”

Gwen shouted with astonishment as she hid her body behind the wall.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang. The flaming arrows caused a large impact as it crashed into the walls. The alliance members who couldn't avoid it quickly enough had 40% of their health drained away at once. The magicians who had low health died instantly from the flaming arrows.

"What on earth? I've never seen a siege weapon like that!"

"Huhuhu, how do you like my modern weapon?"

Ark chuckled as he soon Gwen who had panicked. While this siege was unexpected for Raiden, Ark had been planning how to win back Silvana for a long time. Thus he had invested in the raccoons and developed the modern weapons in the underground laboratory beneath Lancel. It was this bee hive type carriage. The official name was Fire Barrage Crossbow.

-Fire Barrage Crossbow (Special Manufactured Product)

Weapon Type: Large Weapon

Attack: 100 ~ 150 X 24

Range: 500 metres

Durability: 500/500

Weight: 800

User Restriction: Special craftsmen use only

A large weapon created by the raccoons who had studied for a long time, 24 flaming arrows can be loaded on it and fired. In addition, the range at which it can be launched is 1.5 times more than a crossbow. However, the reload time takes longer than other siege weapons.

<Option: Fire attack +40>

\* When used by the raccoon clan, the Firing Speed and accuracy will

increase by 20%.

The money which went into developing the Fire Barrage Crossbow was 4,000 gold. It was 10 times the cost of a normal catapult.

‘To be honest, it is slightly regrettable when seeing the results.....’

In fact, Ark had hoped not to use the modern siege weapons. The weapon could fire a barrage of arrows but the additional damage bonus didn’t apply to the buildings. But when he checked a video of a previous siege, he found there was a need to attack the gate with the Fire Barrage Crossbow. A C-grade estate was able to install turrets on the castle. The range and destructiveness of the bombs from the turrets was enormous. If they fell on the soldiers then the damage would be no joke. This was the reason why other alliance avoided attacking C rated territories. If 10 gun turrets attacked and intercepted the siege weapons then the siege would end instantly.

‘Doesn’t that mean I have to use the Fire Barrage Crossbow to intercept the turrets?’

Ark thought that as he watched the video. And he confirmed that the results were good. 48 arrows flying from the two Fire Barrage Crossbows could counter the bombs from the 10 gun turrets.

‘But the Fire Barrage Crossbow has a fatal weakness.’

“Magicians, cool down the Fire Barrage Crossbow.

“Yes!”

At Ark’s orders the magicians used ice magic on the Fire Barrage Crossbow. This was the weakness of the Fire Barrage Crossbow. Once the 24 arrows were fired, the overheated crossbow would have to be cooled down using ice magic. In other words, it couldn’t be used for a while. On the other hand, the turrets on the walls were similar to the catapults. The bombs were able to be used for continuous attacks.

‘If those guys continue to use the bombs then the Fire Barrage Crossbow will be destroyed but.....’

The Hermes alliance had already witnessed all their bombs being intercepted so they couldn’t use it again. The price of one bomb was 50 gold! It would be different if the interception was a fluke, but the Hermes alliance which had financial difficulties couldn’t afford to continue using the bombs.

“Huhuhu, fighting a war isn’t easy with no money.”

Ark laughed but this actually wasn’t a situation where Ark could laugh. After all, the cost of the flaming arrows was expensive for Ark as well. The price of one arrow was 4 gold. The two Fire Barrage Crossbows launched 48 shots at the same time which was 192 gold flying away. He had laughed when they intercepted the bombs a while ago but inwardly he was crying.

“Well, it is necessary but I can’t use the weapon recklessly.”

Anyway, now the bombs attack was sealed off. Now Gwen had lost the way to stop Ark’s catapult attacks.

“The catapults don’t waste any money. Attack!”

Ark’s 10 catapults fired a barrage of rocks at the gate. But the gate was still under the protection of the Defense Towers so it didn’t receive any damage.

‘Well this is the limitation of having only 10 catapults. I hadn’t expected to penetrate the gate using the catapults. The important thing is to make it look like I intend to penetrate the gate using the catapult. No, to be precise it is to make them think the castle will be penetrated through the gate!’

“The bombs are sealed so shall we begin?”

When Ark turned his body with a pleasant smile, JusticeMan also smiled and nodded. Then he raised his fist and cried out.

"Hmm, is it starting? Good, good. 1st battalion, capture the left castle wall!"

"Wah ah ah!"

JusticeMan led 500 soldiers and rushed towards the castle.

"Huk, t-those guys are.....Are they really trying to capture the castle wall? Stop them!"

The magicians and archers hurled attacks towards the charging battalion. No, as soon as they tried to attack dozens of flaming arrows hit the rampart. It was the support fire from the Fire Barrage Crossbow. The alliance members who tried to attack were hit by the flaming arrows and fell.

"Now! Simultaneously climb the castle wall!"

The soldiers threw hooks up to the rampart and placed ladders against the wall at JusticeMan's command. The soldiers placed their shields above their heads and started to climb the walls. Of course Gwen wasn't just going to stand there watching. While the magicians and arrows was attacking non-stop, the warriors also threw stones and logs from the top of the wall.

"All archers and magicians on the wall intercept their magicians and archers!"

"Warriors protect the archers and magicians with your shields!"

"Damn it, smash the hooks and ladders!"

When Dark Eden's offense truly began, panicked cries emerged all over the place.

"Warriors stop the hooks and the ladders. Don't let them enter!"

"Gwen-nim, the enemy's support of the flaming arrows has started again."

“Everybody take shelter!”

Gwen and the alliance members simultaneously hid themselves. The support fire from the flaming arrows was still powerful but since the crossbow needed to be cooled down, Gwen could read the timing so it never did as much damage as its initial hit.

“Okay, attack the enemy again!”

After the attack from the Fire Barrage Crossbow was over, the alliance members instantly raised their bodies and counter attacked. There were continuous shouts without any breaks! Various magic and arrows were flying all over the place! The soldiers climbing the wall fell down before more replaced them! It was intense and fierce..... It truly was like a scene from a medieval movie.

‘As expected from JusticeMan ajusshi.’

Ark laughed as he looked at the battlefield. The section of the wall where soldiers were gathered was intense and bloody. No, it just looked intense. Although the soldiers were fighting to climb the walls, they weren’t as eager as they looked. While fire and swords appeared on the walls and a considerable amount of time had passed, almost none of Ark’s users had died. No, a lot of users only had their health go down to 50%.

‘Nevertheless, the atmosphere seems like there are dozens of casualties.’

Despite the atmosphere, there actually weren’t a lot of casualties. There were two reasons why the general soldiers fighting the battle was unaware. One reason was the tactics that JusticeMan was using and the other was that they couldn’t see their opponents’ health. Of course, the ‘Penetrating’ scroll or a similar skill that thieves had allowed them to see the enemy’s health. But on a battlefield where there were 1,000 people fighting, there was no time to use scrolls or skills to check the health of a user. So not even one person could grasp the whole battle situation.



‘But it is difficult for Dark Eden which was hastily put together to fight equally with the Hermes alliance. They haven’t really worked together long so the weaknesses will gradually show.’

It didn’t matter how excellent a commander JusticeMan was as the soldiers were the ones fighting directly. Although they had undergone some discipline training, these movements gradually disappeared as they got distracted by their health running out. While the priests could recover the warriors’ health, it would be dangerous for them so they couldn’t heal the entire defensive line before retreating.

‘If this keeps up then our weak point will be exposed to the Hermes alliance. It is better to stop it here.’

“Send a signal to retreat.”

Pepepepeng!

A messenger launched firecrackers into the sky. JusticeMan confirmed the signal and raised his sword before shouting.

“Everybody retreat. Magicians cover them while the warriors protect the priests!”

“1st battalion, join with the main body and recover your health and mana!”

Ark commanded as the 500 soldiers retreated from the castle and left the battlefield. In the combat area they couldn’t recover their health and mana. After the 1st battalion left the field, Ark raised his sword and shouted again.

“The 1st battalion concentrated their attack on the left wall. The 2nd battalion will attack the right wall. Fire Barrage Crossbow, cover the 2nd battalion!”

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk!

The flaming arrows were shot towards the walls. At the same time, 500 soldiers rushed towards the right. The battle for the right wall was just as intense..... No, it only looked intense. When there was a few casualties, Ark had the 2nd battalion retreat, then another battalion attack, retreat, and so on. This pattern of attacks continued so while the fighting continued without any breaks, there were few casualties.

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“They’re retreating again!”

Gwen frowned as she received the information from a soldier.

“That Ark, what is he thinking?”

Gwen realized there was something unclear after seeing the same situation repeated so many times. Until now Gwen had thought Ark was using standard tactics. He didn’t have huge war funds so he couldn’t have drink potions like water during the siege. So it was obvious he had the troops retreat once the priest’s mana ran out and they couldn’t heal anymore. The same thing applied to splitting his troops. Some beginners might think that throwing more troops onto the battlefield was better but siege warfare was different. No matter how many troops there were, the actual amount that could fight was limited thanks to the castle walls. If they ran directly into battle then they would just be hit by arrows. In addition, if the troops withdrew when they were too damaged then Gwen could lead an assault group outside the castle to wipe them out. That’s why in a siege the forces were always split.

“Ark’s way of thinking isn’t wrong. But.....”

The number of troops attacking was too low. The Hermes alliance had 3,200 troops deployed outside. Of course, with the walls the amount of troops assigned to each area was limited. But they were able to concentrate 1,000 troops on the side walls. If Ark really intended to control the walls then he needed a minimum of 1,000 people. However, Ark never committed more than 500 people.

“Aside from their first attack, the remaining ones weren’t as aggressive. I can tell just by looking at the main body of Ark’s forces. They’ve attacked so many times but the troops hasn’t decreased that much. It is also the same for us. In the end, he really doesn’t intend to control the castle walls. Is he trying to buy time so he can smash the Defense Towers?”

If that was the reason then Ark’s passive attacks was understandable. With the Defense Towers destroyed it would certainly be possible to destroy the gate with the 10 catapults and that strange large weapon. Gwen then smiled.

“If you think that then you’ve already failed!”

Gwen contacted the person in charge of the Defense Towers who said.

*-There are only 500 enemies attacking here. They haven’t even entered the trap field. You don’t have to worry about this place.*

In the old days, the Hermes alliance had used a plan to destroy the Defense Towers. After occupying the castle, the Hermes alliance had imitate their strategy and buried traps around the towers while leaving magicians and archers in buried bunkers. Of course, this method had a weak point. If the enemy broke through the minefield then the magicians and archers would easily collapse. However, with 500 troops it was impossible to pass through the mine field while being attacked by 700 archers and magicians. The one method was to use the tunnel plan that Ark had used in the past. However, the Hermes alliance was already aware of this plan. Therefore they had placed steel all over the bottom of the Defense Towers.

“If those guys haven’t made it through the minefield yet then there is no way they will occupy the Defense Towers. With the Defense Towers active, there is no way 10 catapults can destroy the gate. Well, it’s taken a lot of Ark’s time so I’m grateful.”

Gwen laughed as she looked at the huge hourglass. While they hadn’t suffered any damage, the pointless repetitive battles meant the 16 hours

had already passed since the siege began. Typically the castle had to enter the castle within 18 hours in order to win. There was 2 hours left to that time limit but there was no way Ark could break into the castle during that time.

“Okay, it has been boring but there’s not much time left. Only 8 hours until our victory!”

Gwen encouraged the Hermes alliance members who were tired from Dark Eden’s continuous attacks. Finally the hourglass showed that the 18th hour had passed.

“Now there is no way they can destroy the Defense Towers, the gate and occupy the castle!”

Gwen was sure of their victory.

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“That’s it!”

Ark laughed as he looked at the huge hourglass. Now only one quarter of the sand was left in the hourglass. The remaining time until the siege finished was 6 hours. But the Defense Towers were still well and the Hermes alliance’s members had barely decreased. On the other hand, while Dark Eden had tried to preserve their troops 800 of them still died. It was a desperate situation but Ark firmly believed in his victory. Ark stood up and turned around to look at the rehabilitation members.

“Hyung-nims, are you ready?”

“Yes, any time is okay.”

Bul-kkun grinned and nodded.

“Then let’s go. Engineer unit, move the catapults towards the castle!”

The dozens of engineers moved the catapult at Ark's command. When it entered into range, magic and arrows were instantly aimed towards it. With hundreds of attacks concentrated on it, one of the catapults instantly caught on fire.

"Sheesh. Fire Barrage Crossbow, support the catapults!"

"Yes, target sighted fire!"

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk!

The two crossbows turned and fired the flaming arrows. Then there were successive explosions along the walls. While the Hermes alliance hid themselves from the flaming arrows, the engineers unit was able to move a catapult to the target point.

"Now!"

Ark got on the catapult and shouted. Following him was Bul-kkun, Ddeok-dae, Hae Gyeol-sa, Yapsab, Jjak-tung and Tazza who were all wearing headbands with 'Commandos' on them. Each of them lined up and saluted.

"I'll meet you in hell!"

Ark confirmed that all the rehabilitation members had were on the catapults and shouted.

"Catapults aim vertically and fire!"

Tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

Seven of the catapults fired simultaneously. At the same time, Ark and the rehabilitation members flew up at a tremendous speed. They flew in a parabola and headed towards the castle walls.

"What? That guys, are they crazy?"

Gwen murmured with an absurd expression. Were they thinking about penetrating the walls by flying on the catapults? Did they think they

would be safe after falling dozens of metres? No, even if they managed to survive the fall damage how would they fight against 3,200 people? Did they think this was GI Joe? Those thoughts passed through Gwen's mind without seconds. She eventually came to the conclusion that Ark became crazy after failing the siege. But in the next moment Gwen witnessed an amazing scene.

"Slime's Time, NO1!"

A cry emerged from Ark's mouth just before he hit the ground. At the same time, a yellow viscous liquid covered Ark's body. It wasn't just Ark. The yellow liquid covered all of the rehabilitation members' bodies. Then Ark and the rehabilitation members impacted with the ground.

Ttiyong-ttiyong!

Ark and the rehabilitation members bounced up like rubber balls?

"What the, that is?"

Gwen and the rehabilitation members looked at the bouncing people with an absurd look. But after a brief moment, Gwen raised her voice.

"What are you staring blankly at? This is a great opportunity to get Ark. Attack them!"

"Wah ah ah!"

100 of the alliance members shrieked and rushed up at Gwen's command. Dozens of swords and arrows attacked Ark! But.....

Ttiyong-ttiyong!

The swords and arrows just bounced off. That's right. Ark was using the special skill of the Slime's Immortality Pill, Slime's Time! Any physical damage or fall damage would be 100% nullified. The other rehabilitation members had also eaten the Slime's Immortality Pill in Seutandal. Well,

it wasn't the original product so it had the side effect of amplifying pain by 50 times.....

"Keuak!"

"My spirit flew away the moment I hit the ground."

The rehabilitation members groaned after they hit the ground. But the rehabilitation members were raised in a dark world filled with violence so they instantly raised their body.

"They're coming! Everybody stay focused!"

"Jjak-tung, Tazza, gather back to back and stop them!"

"Okay, keuak! Damn, that hurts!"

Jjak-tung and Tazza wobbled as the swords and arrows bounced off.

"Get out of the way!"

Meanwhile Bul-kkun, Ddeok-dae and Hae Gyeol-sa ran up to the alliance members and head-butted them. While Slime's Time made them invincible to physical attacks, they also couldn't attack with their weapons. Thus the head-butt actually didn't do any damage. However, their bodies were like rubber so the Hermes alliance members flew back a few metres.

"Hahaha! How is it? Our bodies are now like rubber! Head butt!"

So Ark and the rehabilitation members pushed the alliance members back with a head butt and ran towards the gate.

"What is this? Why are they heading to the gate.....?"

"Are they trying to open the gate?"

But it was impossible to just pull the gate open like an ordinary door. Naturally the equipment to operate the gate was kept separately. Ark

used to be the Lord so he should've known that as well. Then why was he heading to the gate? Gwen found it impossible to understand.

"I don't know what he is doing but that guy is like a rat in a bag. Ark is the leader of Dark Eden. If he dies then the siege is over!"

"But these guys are impervious to attacks!"

"Bah! This is a game so no skill is invincible. If physical attacks don't work then try magic. All magicians attack these guys!"

The magicians started chanting spells at Gwen's command.

"Anger of the blazing fire, Rage of Fire!"

"Splitting blade of the wind, Wind Cutter!"

"The cold north wind, Ice Spike!"

"Ark, watch out!"

Bul-kkun shouted.

That's right. It was Slime's Time weakness. While it invalidated physical attacks by 100%, it also made them 100% more vulnerable to magic. For 10 minutes there were invincible against warriors but vulnerable to magicians. If they were hit by dozens of magic then they would be broken like tofu. At that moment Ark heard Racard's voice from above him.

"Master, the magicians are attacking from your 3 o'clock and your 11 o'clock!"

"Hyung-nims, this way!"

Ark shouted as he instinctively moved his body. Then he head butted some alliance members. The magic flying towards Ark and the rehabilitation group hit the alliance members instead. Ark had used the alliance members as a shield to stop the magic attacks.



“You fools! Physical attacks won’t connect so all warriors retreat!”

Gwen shouted angrily. The hundreds of alliance members surrounding Ark’s group disappeared. Then the dozens of magic shots flew back towards Ark and the rehabilitation group. They couldn’t use the alliance members as an obstacle anymore!

“Damn, I’ll go first!”

Bul-kkun bit his lips and jumped in front of Ark. At the same time, blasts of fire, wind and ice hit Bul-kkun’s body.

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

He was 100% vulnerable to magic attacks. The incomplete Slime’s Immortality Pill also increased pain by 50 times so Bul-kkun screamed as he really felt like he was being roasted and frozen. He collapsed to the ground and raised his thumb.

“.....Go!”

“Ugh, Bul-kkun your sacrifice won’t be in vain!”

“The magic is flying!”

“Ohhhhh, it is my turn now!”

This time it was Hae Gyeol-sa who jumped in front of Ark and was burnt.

“H-Hyung-nim.....!”

“Don’t turn around, go! The gate is right around the corner!”

Yapsab grabbed Ark’s shoulder and shouted. Ark looked at Hae Gyeol-sa before turning around. Yes, now wasn’t the time to be flooded with sentiment! The success or failure of the siege depended on this operation. Ark clenched his teeth and ran towards the gate. Magic flew non-stop but Ddeok-dae, Yapsab, Jjak-tung and Tazza blocked Ark with their bodies. But the hundreds of magicians poured down magic on

them who had their magic resistance decreased by 100%. In the end, the rehabilitation members could only take a few steps before they collapsed. It hadn't even been 1 minute until the last of them, Jjak-tung collapsed.

'Damn, there's only 10 metres left.....!'

Ark moaned as he looked at the approaching gate. The magicians on the wall were already chanting spells. When the chants were complete then Ark would die.

'.....Is it going to end here?'

Ark was just thinking that.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

A huge explosion suddenly occurred on the walls. The Fire Barrage Crossbow had finished cooling and had sent more flaming arrows towards the walls. The magicians who had been concentrated on Ark were hit and fell down. The rest of the magicians also received impact from the arrows and had their chants cancelled.

'Now!'

Ark ran between the falling magicians. Although a few magicians who hadn't been blown away tried to attack him, they couldn't aim properly. Ark rolled his body to avoid the magic and finally arrived at the gate.

"Heh, what's this? Does he intend to break the gate by himself?"

Gwen snorted and muttered. Ark's hands flashed as he arrived at the gate. Then he took out a small hourglass from his bag. Ark used the hourglass and a message window appeared.

-You have used the Phantom Hourglass.

<You can turn time back 100 years or accelerate time forward a maximum of 500 years>

That's right. The item Ark was holding up was the Phantom Hourglass! It was the reason he headed towards the gate.

"Maximum acceleration!"

Then the sand at the top started to fall at a tremendous speed. At the same time, an amazing change started to happen to the castle gate. The gate which had been attacked for 10 hours yet hadn't even lost 50% durability instantly turned red. The gate also started to be pierced with holes. Since the Phantom Hourglass accelerated time 500 years forward, the steel gate became rusted and battered.

"Now's the time. Catapults attack the gate!"

Ark shouted through the tattered gate. At the same time, the catapults outside sent their rocks flying.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The already corroded gate which was barely hanging on splintered and broke into two pieces. The gate had been breached despite the Defense Towers still standing. Blood disappeared from Gwen's face as she looked at the broken gate.

"U-unbelievable..... The gate.....!"

The Hermes alliance also stared with surprise.

"R-repair the gates!"

Gwen shouted when she heard Ark's voice.

"The whole army, charge Silvana!"

Gwen looked outside with surprise.

"Then the reason Ark attacked so roughly until now.....!"

Now Gwen realized Ark's arm. Despite battling for 18 hours, there had been almost no casualties. From the 3,300 Dark Eden troops, around 800

people had died. In other words, there were still 2,500 troops in front of the gates. Of course, the Hermes alliance had received even less damage and only 300 people had died. There still remained 2,900 stationed on the castle walls. But the Hermes alliance was dispersed all around the outside. If Dark Eden broke in and the fighting became confused, the magicians and archers on the walls wouldn't be able to attack properly. There was also the tremendous power of the Fire Barrage Crossbow.

"But we have 1,000 more troops than them."

That was Gwen's thought.

*-Gwen, stop those guys from entering!*

She suddenly heard Raiden whisper in her ear.

*-But.....*

*-You fool, this is Ark's scheme. I thought it was possible so I contacted the Defense Towers. The Dark Eden troops attacking the Defense Towers retreated 30 minutes ago!*

*-The troops attacking the Defense Towers have retreated? Then.....!"*

Gwen felt like she had been hit on the back of her head with a hammer. The troops attacking the Defense Towers had already retreated 30 minutes ago. Then those guys were coming here. If they joined then there would be 3,500 people! If the Hermes alliance combined their troops from inside the castle then they would have 3,900 people. Of course, the Hermes alliance had the 1,400 troops stationed at the Defense Towers but it would take them 30 minutes if they left now. She had to rally the troops and hold out until then. But a melee fight inside the walls would be confusing and dangerous. However, if there weren't any extra troops than the 2,900 Hermes members on the walls would be trampled by the 3,500 Dark Eden members!

*-Furthermore, the opponent is Ark. If he did all this to break the gate then he would definitely have some ulterior motives. We absolutely can't give the castle to him! But now there is no time to worry about Ark. Stop their entry!*

Gwen received Raiden's order and shouted towards the alliance members.

"No. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 assault units! Dispatch those troops immediately! Charge the enemy and destroy the catapults and the large weapons. Maintain formation in front of the gate and stop their entry! The rest of you just restore the gate as much as possible. The Defense Towers are still standing. If the large weapon is destroyed and the gates repaired then it will be possible to endure for the remaining time!"

So Gwen led 1,500 troops to the gate. But Gwen was thinking about it too much. While Ark and the rehabilitation members were trying to break the gate, the rest of Dark Eden was just watching. If Dark Eden attacked the castle during that time then Ark and the rehabilitation members wouldn't have received the magicians' attack so one-sidedly. In addition, Dark Eden wasn't showing large movements even after the gate broke. However, Gwen and Raiden were too hasty and couldn't realize that point. And there was another part Gwen missed. It was why Ark used the risky strategy of jumping inside the castle with the catapult to corrode the castle gate. Ark could've mixed in with Dark Eden while using Slime's Time to access the gate from the outside.

Nevertheless, Ark had used the catapult to corrode the gate from inside the castle. The reason why.....

## **Act 5: Grand Strategy, Mackerel Pieces Gamble**

"Catch him!"

The cry emerged from the castle. Gwen had led 1,500 troops and ran outside the castle. This was because Ark had destroyed the gate. Ark had avoided the magic of the alliance members and ran away inside the castle grounds. There were still 1,400 members left inside but they had no time to pay attention to Ark. Since there was no time to prepare for the situation, they were preoccupied with repairing the gate. But Ark

was the enemy commander and he was an important before who could influence the military situation by himself, so 50 people were chasing after him.

“There is nowhere for you to run away!”

“The skill where our physical attacks don’t connect won’t last much longer!”

The alliance members shouted as they threw arrows and magic at him. The arrows weren’t a problem for Ark thanks to the effect of Slime’s Time. The dangerous thing was the magic. And the number had lessened so the magic was easy to avoid. Ark didn’t worry about the arrows and just focused on avoiding the magic attacks. He used Dark Dance and Sprint to run between walls and have the magic impact with them instead.

‘Huk huk, not long left! I just have to pass this lane!’

Ark once again used a building to avoid the magic and turned the corner.

“Over here!”

Around 20 alliance members appeared before him. They had predicted Ark’s path and moved ahead to block him. Ark became frightened as three magicians started to chant spells. There were buildings blocking his left and right so he couldn’t avoid the damage!

‘Damn, I’ll just have to break through the front!’

Ark rushed towards the front magician. He used Sprint to collide with the magicians chanting who screamed and fell to the ground.

‘That’s it, now I can use the warriors to block the attacks from other magicians.....’

Ark thought that and plunged into the crowd of warriors. Suddenly he felt something throb and a huge amount of his health was sucked out.

‘Huk, what the?’

Ark reflexively turned and looked at the warriors. The warriors had flames wrapped around their sword. The magicians had used a spell to give magic to the warriors' weapons.

"Kukuku, did you think we would just stay idle?"

"Take this you cocky bastard!"

'They've noticed the weakness in Slime's Time. I'm screwed!'

Ark looked at the flame swords with horror. That's right. The biggest weakness of Slime's Time wasn't magic, but magic enchantment. While the physical damage was invalidated, Ark would still be hurt from the magic damage. Since his magic resistance had decreased by 100%, that amount wasn't small. Moreover, Ark couldn't attack while Slime's Time was still active. It was possible to avoid the magicians' attacks since they took a while to cast but the warriors were more difficult.

"You're dead!"

The warriors cried out as they rushed forward. Meanwhile, the magicians were giving magic enchantments to the other warriors. Once all the warriors had magic swords and the magicians aimed for Ark again, he would be on the defensive. Before he could escape through a gap he created with a head butt but it was suicide to run towards the warriors holding magic swords. And it wasn't possible to go back. The other 30 alliance members were coming up behind him.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

They started attacking earnestly and his health was drained out. But when he used Slime's Time, his entire body was covered in slime so he couldn't open his bag to use any items like potions. Of course, the items inside Radun weren't affected but his whole body was covered so he couldn't drink the potions anyway.

'If only Slime's Time was over.....'

Ark glared at the small icon in front of him. It was the icon which displayed the time remaining for Slime's Time. Now there was less than two minutes left. Ark reduced the damage using Dark Dance and waited for the icon to disappear. When there was only 1 minute left, he felt something hot behind him. At the same time, he lost a lot of health and fell down.

"There he is!"

The other 30 alliance members chasing him had arrived. But they weren't the problem. Ark only had 5% health left. After being hit by the magic and falling down, he had become completely surrounded. If he was hit with the magic sword then he would definitely die!

"Die!"

A warrior swung his sword with a smile of satisfaction. No, he tried to swing it.

"Master!"

Racard fell from the sky like lightning and crashed into the warrior. Then he grabbed the warrior's ear and started head butting him in the nose. The warrior got a nosebleed and retreated from Racard. Meanwhile Ark rolled his body and escaped from the circle.

"What is that?"

"These guys don't have to concern you. I'll rush and smash them!"

Then he rushed towards the dozens of warriors holding magic swords. Ark who was leaning against a wall shouted.

"Summon Demon, Razak, Iron Fire Wall!"

Clack clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

A bony lump rose in front of Ark and formed into Razak. Razak raised his shield and blocked the flames heading for Ark. The wings of flame appeared on both sides of the shield and blocked the soldiers running



towards them. It was the special skill of the Blazing Fire Draconian Shield, Iron Fire Wall! It was a skill with a range of 10 metres which invalidated 'Dash' and caused 'Stun' and flame damage! When the warriors rushed into Razak's Iron Fire Wall, the soldiers stumbled and were pushed back. So Razak was able to fend off the warriors' attacks using his shield. Now Ark just had to wait behind Razak for Slime's Time to finish.

"What is that?"

"It doesn't matter. He doesn't have a lot of health left. Focus your magic attacks on him! Even with that skeleton, he won't be able to endure the magic attacks!"

The magicians circled Ark and Razak and started to simultaneously chant spells.

'Damn, I just have to hold on for a few seconds.....'

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Ark had been biting his lip while thinking desperately. Then Radun suddenly moved from Ark's waist and licked his tongue. Before Ark could say anything, Radun had arrived underneath the magicians' feet with tremendous speed. At the same time, an explosion occurred underneath the magicians who were chanting spells.

"Ack! What, what the?"

The magicians' concentration broke from the unexpected shock and their spells were cancelled.

'Ah, that's right! Didn't Radun learn that skill?'

The skill that Radun used was Fire Aura. Radun had learnt this skill only a few days ago. Ark had been leading the troops towards Silvana from Lancel when Radun's body suddenly heated up and a message window popped up.

-Your summon Radun has digested 50% of the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian.

Radun's body has changed after being influenced by the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian. When the Alamone grows to a certain extent, it has the ability to master similar skills which belong to other species. When that power is fully absorbed into the body, it can evolve into a new species. While the secret of an Alamone's growth is still unknown, its body can grow into something completely different under the influence of other species.

After absorbing the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian, he has begun to evolve into something different from both an Alamone and a Fire Draconian. Every time the absorption of the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian reaches a certain level, Radun will learn a new skill.

-Your summon Radun has absorbed the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian and awakened a new skill.

Fire Aura (Beginner, Racial Special Skill): A special skill created by the Alamone after absorbing the power of the Fire Draconians. Fire Aura gives the ability to activate the power of fire. When the ability is used, all enemies within a 20 metre diameter will receive continuous fire damage.

<All enemies within 20 metres will receive 10~20 fire damage. Mana consumption: 20 mana every second>

The Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian was a material to trigger Radun's evolution. After reaching 50% absorption, Radun could summon the spirits of fire to deal damage. That was Fire Aura. It was a skill which gave continuous damage like a magician's wide area magic. Of course, the damage was only 10~20 but the unexpected shock caused the magicians' spells to fail. It was a method Ark hadn't even considered.

"T-this snake.....!"

The magicians glared at Radun. However, Ark immediately cancelled his summoning and Radun disappeared.

“You did well Racard, Razak and Radun.”

Ark who was hiding in the corner smiled and murmured.

“What? That guy’s slime has disappeared?”

The alliance members muttered as they looked at Ark again. That’s right. Thanks to the help of his summons, Slime’s Time had finally disappeared.

“Good, isn’t it possible to hit him with our swords now?”

“He is still surrounded. We just have to smash that skeleton!”

The alliance members swung their swords and rushed to attack. But they still hadn’t grasped the situation. The reason Ark had run around until the slime was gone was because he could now use 100% of his skills. Ark threw a piece of black meat that he took from his bag. The alliance members who were about to attack suddenly burst out screaming.

“Blazing fire..... Ack! T-this scent, what.....? Cough, cough!”

“Sniper s..... Eh, what? Ugh, my eyes! I-I can’t see.....!”

“Huhuhu, how is it? The taste of my creative dishes?”

Ark smirked while holding his nose. That’s right. The black meat Ark threw was a food made using Creative Cooking. Ark had named the dish he made ‘Hell Bomb!’

-Hell Bomb

A special food made using Creative Cooking. It is created by combining hot peppers, vinegar, rotten meat, horseradish etc. An extremely bad smell which goes beyond human limits is drifting from this dish. If you pull it out in a public place then you will receive a wild beating.

<Hell Bomb has a range of 5 metres>

It was one of the creative dishes Ark created, Hell Bomb! The smell was horrible enough to make even Ark lose consciousness. In New World, users might only feel a static shock if their limbs were cut off but their sense of smell was 100% real. The Hell Bomb was just like a gas grenade! The food which smelled like it had been rotting for hundreds of years caused the alliance members to panic and block their noses while rolling on the ground.

“Ugh, I made it but it really does smell horrible.”

Even Ark who was outside the range of Hell Bomb felt nauseated.

‘Anyway, the effect of the smell doesn’t last long.’

Hell Bomb wasn’t a food which could cause an abnormal state. While the smell would initially paralyze the user, their noses would eventually adapt to the smell so it was ineffective. In other words, the Hell Bomb would just cause them to panic for 1~2 minutes!

“Racard, Razak, open the path!”

Snap!

Ark threw his body and kneed one of the alliance members in the face. And he jumped over the person who had fallen down.

“T-this bastard..... Cough..... I won’t miss!”

When Ark tried to escape, the warriors rushed to his left and right side. However, they still hadn’t completely recovered from Ark’s bio-terrorism and Racard and Razak used their skills to push them aside and create a path.

“C-catch him!”

After a while, the pursuing members chased Ark to a place blocked on all sides by walls. Ark stopped running and the voices of the alliance members could be heard behind him.

“Huhuhu, there’s no place for you to run away anymore!”

“You might be like a flea but you won’t be able to escape anymore.”

“That rotten food also won’t work anymore!”

The alliance members muttered while the noses were still runny and they had tears in their eyes. At that moment, Ark turned around and laughed.

“It’s already finished.”

“Heh, are you giving up?”

“No, I’m saying this is my destination.”

“This is your destination? What does that mean.....?”

“This is what it means.”

Ark raised his finger while drinking a recovery potion. It was at that time. Suddenly an earthquake seemed to occur in the area.

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“Charge!”

There was a huge dust cloud on the battlefield. It was from Gwen and the 1,500 Hermes members she commanded!

‘There are a lot of engineers in the castle. If I hold on for 10~20 minutes then the gate should be somewhat repaired.’

Of course, such emergency methods can’t be compared to a proper steel gate. It would barely have the form of a gate. However, there were still the Defense Towers. Once the shape of the gate was fixed, it will be able to receive the defense bonus and the automatic durability recovery from the Defense Towers.

‘The problem is that guy’s catapults and his large weapon which looks like a bee hive!’

If those attacks are concentrated on the gate which had been restored using emergency methods then it won't even last a few minutes. They would only be able to endure if they stopped the siege weapons. That was the reason why Gwen hurriedly led the troops outside.

'Besides, this is the last chance we have to attack them!'

Currently, Dark Eden had 2,500 troops remaining. But Ark had flown over the castle walls while 500 troops were attacking one of the side castle walls. In other words, Dark Eden actually had 2,000 troops in front of the castle. But that situation where Dark Eden only had 2,000 troops wouldn't last long. Soon the 500 troops would return from attacking one of the side walls and the 1,000 troops who were attacking the Defense Towers would arrive. When that happened Dark Eden would have 3,500 fighters. Now was the only chance for Gwen to destroy the siege weapons!

'Defending while the siege weapons are still working is suicide! But if they are destroyed then we can maintain a defense formation in front of the gate!'

With the support fire of the 1,400 troops remaining inside the castle, we can slowly defeat Dark Eden's 3,500 people.

'That Ark is also trapped inside the castle grounds. If you prevent their attacks and kill Ark then this siege is over. That Ark thought that he couldn't smash the gates in time so he used a shortcut, but that was his miscalculation. The Hermes alliance didn't maintain Silvana for 1 year through luck!'

Tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

Then the catapult launched a volley of rocks.

"All troops spread out!"

Gwen shouted and the assault unit scattered. The flying rocks only managed to hit a few people. The catapult couldn't show its true strength against moving targets. The Fire Barrage Crossbow was the

same. Although the flaming arrows headed towards the approaching troops, most of them missed.

“Huk, run away!”

The raccoons operating the siege weapons screamed as the assault troops came charging forward. Then they quickly disappeared into the ground.

‘What the, those guys?’

Gwen was puzzled as she looked at the holes the raccoons had disappeared through. However, the Dark Eden members were even more confusing than the raccoons. Gwen had showed up in front of the siege weapons but Dark Eden didn’t even move. Only the raccoons escaped while the assault troops reached the catapults and crossbows. The 2,000 Dark Eden troops didn’t move one step or even shoot arrows.

‘Why.....? Aha, that’s right, is Ark dead?’

A smile of satisfaction spread on Gwen’s face after checking Dark Eden’s reactions. Dark Eden wasn’t a guild or alliance. It was an army which Ark had created by hiring soldiers. But their leader Ark had died and now they didn’t know what to do.

‘That Ark is really stupid, everything became even easier because he died. Now these guys are just rubbish. There is no need to think when they are the opponents!’

Gwen amended her plan of destroying the siege weapons and retreating. Currently it was 2,000 against 1,500 with Gwen’s troops having inferior numbers, but the difference of 500 people won’t matter now that they had lost their military leader.

“Assault troops prepare for a 10 minute battle. Units 1 and 2, follow me and attack the siege weapons! Units 3, 4, and 5 will penetrate to the centre of the enemy using the wedge formation!”

Gwen shouted in a huge voice. In an ordinary battle, it was necessary to pay attention to health and mana. If mana ran out then the essential skills couldn't be used. A 10 minute battle meant they didn't have to worry about mana and could use as much skills as they liked. Gwen determined that 10 minutes was enough to deal the maximum damage and retreat to the gate before the rest of Dark Eden arrived.

"Ohhhh, Warrior's Valour!"

"Triple shot!"

When the battle condition of 10 minutes was announced, the assault troops instantly prepared for battle. They flocked forward and used various skills.

Snap, chi chi chi chi chi.....

Suddenly a brilliant light appeared underneath the siege weapons. It wasn't just the siege weapons. The light also spread underneath Dark Eden and started burning here and there.

"What the, this is? It can't be....?"

Gwen flinched and tried to withdraw.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Suddenly a huge explosion occurred in front of her and fire shot up. The members attacking the siege weapons were thrown back several metres. Gwen was also caught by the explosion in front of her and received huge damage before flying back. But she didn't bother checking her health.

"What, what, what.....?"

Gwen surveyed the area with a blackened face. The area was full of dust and smoke. She saw that the members of the assault troops were scattered all over the place. However, Gwen still couldn't properly understand the situation. What the hell was going on?



‘That was clearly a trap just now. Then they already knew we would attack the siege weapons and planted some traps? The siege weapons were used as a trap?’

It wasn’t just the siege weapons. The explosion also occurred where the Dark Eden members were. Therefore the assault units who advanced into the main body of Dark Eden also received huge damage. The death toll was 200 people, with most of the casualties being priests and magicians with lower health. It was as much damage as 18 hours of defending the walls. And the rest of the remaining 1,300 people had their health range from 40% left to 10% left. But that wasn’t the truly confusing thing.

“The explosion occurred at the siege weapons and within Dark Eden’s camp. We were involved in the explosion but those guys were at the centre of it. They are bound to suffer more damage. Then the 2,000 troops and siege weapons were sacrificed just to deal some damage to us? Furthermore, these traps must’ve been prepared for a while. What is this nonsense.....?’

It wasn’t common sense. Anyway, Gwen thought that all the Dark Eden members would definitely be scattered around the place thanks to the explosion. But when the dust and smoke finally subsided, Gwen witnessed an incredible sight. The 2,000 Dark Eden members who had received the explosion were still standing in the same place and looked completely fine.

“This is..... How could they when they were in the midst of the explosion.....?’

Gwen murmured with a bewildered expression. Suddenly the scene where the detonation hit the Dark Eden members came to her mind. Surprisingly, the explosion penetrated their bodies and just passed through?

Hihihing!

At the same time, a cry of a horse could be heard from several metres away. She reflexively turned her head and spotted a white horse. With a horn in the middle of its forehead, the white horse was a unicorn. And there was a girl riding the unicorn. The situation was already difficult to understand and suddenly this female appeared! Gwen felt a sudden feeling of unease.

“Catch her! Grab that girl!”

Gwen who was struck by anxiety suddenly shouted. At the same time, hundreds of soldiers rushed towards the girl. However, they were a dozen metres from her when the ground suddenly became hollow and sank, causing the rushing soldiers to fall.

“Ugh! A trap!”

“Huk, what is this?”

The screaming soldiers fell into the trap. At the same time, a message window appeared in front of the soldiers.

-You have fallen into ‘filth which gives off a bad smell!’

This filth has become stuck to your body. Thanks to the sticky filth, your movement speed has decreased by 30% and your morale has fallen from the terrible smell. The morale of your colleagues will also fall from the stench. This effect will last until you take a bath.

Apart from the creative dishes Ark made, he also dug traps that were filled with stinky filth. It was filth made from the failed products of Survival Cooking and other rotten food..... No, it was fertilizer! The soldiers who fell into the trap had their morale and movement speed decreased. Moreover, the smell was so horrible that the morale of their colleagues also decreased. Then the girl looked at the soldiers who had fallen into a pile of filth and laughed. She stroked the unicorn and said.

“Kikiki, let’s go Unicorn!”

Then the unicorn snorted and farted before running away. It was strange to see the fairy-tale like unicorn do such dirty actions. But despite its personality, a unicorn was a unicorn. When it showed of its movement speed of +1000%, the unicorn and girl disappeared like ghosts. And the unicorn and girl were gone, the 2,000 Dark Eden troops blurred and gradually disappeared.

“An illusion? This was all an illusion?”

Gwen finally figured out the reason for the strange incidents. Gwen had heard that the secret society members who attacked Lancel had acted strange. But the section where the secret society suffered immense damage from the illusions wasn't broadcasted on TV. It wasn't a mere illusion, but one that could replicate 1~2 villages perfectly!

“Then what happened just now.....!”

That's right. The girl riding the unicorn was Roco. The Dark Eden soldiers were all illusions created by Roco's Illusion Sonata. However, Gwen was thrown into an even more chaotic state of mind.

“No. Was it truly an illusion? No way. We had been fighting them on the walls. Then we've just been fighting against illusions? Impossible.....”

Gwen murmured until she suddenly remembered something.

‘Come to think of it.....It is confirmed that those guys really attacked the castle walls.....’

Yet the same guys never appeared twice!

‘Then..... The reason Ark passively attacked for 18 hours..... Was to hide his troops?’

That's right. There was a reason Ark had been passive for 18 hours. If he tried to hide all the troops at once, it would be noticeable even with the illusion. But if he attacked the castle with 500 troops and sent them to a recovery place then there would be no suspicion. And Gwen had no

reason to pay attention to those 500 people after they left. There was no time for such thoughts when another 500 troops were attacking as long as she confirmed that the main body still had 2,000 people. In fact, the 500 troops which retreated outside of sight didn't return to the main army. And then Roco filled up the missing 500 spots with Illusion Sonata. It was a trick which took 18 hours! This was the reason Ark had to sneak into the castle to make the gate corrode. Gwen suddenly had a thought which caused goose bumps on her body.

'Then where did the 2,000 troops disappear to.....?'

Gwen looked back at Silvana castle. If they hid 2,000 troops then this situation where Gwen led 1,500 troops outside was the best timing to attack the castle. Fortunately, there were no traces of Dark Eden moving. The gate had also recovered to some extent.

'Why did those guys waste this chance to attack the castle? Did they hide the troops just to lure us into this trap? Or did the gate recover faster than they expected so they missed the timing? I don't know what happened but I feel assured that the worst situation has been avoided. I have to return to the castle and arrange the defense formation before those other guys arrive!'

"Get up, be on guard and return to the castle. You can recover when we reach the castle!"

Gwen rushed the alliance members and arrived in front of the gate.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kakang, pepepepeng!

The violent sounds of swords impacting could be heard! The noise continued and there were even signs of fighting on the walls. When Gwen raised her head, she saw that the Dark Eden soldiers were fighting against the Hermes members.

'What the? How did they get in?'

*-What's going on?*

Gwen sent a whisper to the leader behind the walls.

*-Gwen-nim, it is a surprise attack by the enemy!*

*-An attack? What does that mean? Where did the enemy come from? Wasn't the gate blocked up?*

*-Those fellows didn't come from the gate. There are 2,500 of them!*

*-2...2,500? What are you talking about? How could those troops suddenly appear inside the castle grounds?*

*-I don't know. Ugh!*

*-Damn, what the hell is going on? Open the gate at once!*

*-We can't open the gate!*

*-What? Can't open the gate?*

*-Right now the gate is..... We're not the ones repairing it!*

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"What, what the?"

"What is this vibration.....?"

The alliance members looked around stupidly. It was a huge noise like something was getting pushed up. The vibrations gradually approached and one alliance member shouted.

"This vibration is coming from there!"

The alliance member pointed to a temple within Silvana that was behind Ark. That's right. The ground shaking vibrations was coming from within the temple. But the size of the temple was only around 10 metres. What was happening inside the temple that could cause this large

vibration? The 50 alliance members looked around with a confused expression.

Ku ku ku ku..... Kwaaaaaaah!

“Ohhhhhh!”

“Silvana castle!”

The vibration seemed more frequent until the doors of the temple seemed to burst open. And a huge number of soldiers started pouring out of the small temple. The alliance members’ mouths gaped widely at the sight.

“T-those guys are.....?”

“Dark Eden! They are the troops from Dark Eden!”

“Bingo, kill them.”

Ark laughed and drew his fingers across his neck. Then the soldiers from the temple literally swarmed over the alliance members. It was like seeing a tsunami hit a small boat. Hundreds of soldiers had already poured out of the temple so the alliance members’ health quickly ran out. In less than a minute the 50 alliance members had already died.

“Ark, are you okay?”

The voice could be heard from someone leaving the temple. It was JusticeMan, Lariette, Shambala, Isyuram and the four rehabilitation members who didn’t participate in the special attack. Ark drank recovery potions and laughed.

“Yes, you came just in time.”

That’s right. This was the strategy Ark developed to capture Silvana. Using Roco’s Illusion Sonata, he could trick Gwen and smuggle in 2,500 troops. His forces retreating to a place the soldiers on the walls couldn’t see wasn’t for the sake of recovery. It was to gather them in a secret place hidden in Silvana. This was the reason Ark had been

convinced of his victory. He knew about the secret dungeon underneath the Asyeosu temple. Before passing the castle to Raiden, Ark had the raccoons dig a tunnel to the dungeon.

‘That is the no. 1 tunnel! Then I just have to drag the troops through the no. 1 tunnel to infiltrate the castle!’

That’s why hundreds of gold was used to trick Gwen, from the 4,000 gold he spent on the Fire Barrage Crossbow to the 50 gold spent on potions that Roco drank to maintain the Illusion Sonata for 18 hours. All that gold invested was to secretly bring 2,500 into Silvana. Anyway, the operation was a great success!

‘But now comes the really important part!’

“There’s no time. It is a speed competition now. Advance to the gate!”

“Wah ah ah!”

Ark led his troops towards the gate.

“Racard, use satellite surveillance mode and report on the situation!”

“Yes!”

Racard replied and flew into the sky.

“JusticeMan ajusshi, rehabilitation hyung-nims, if the troops inside the castle move then the situation will be difficult. Take 800 people and check that the troops inside the castle don’t move!”

“Understood.”

JusticeMan nodded and led 800 troops towards the castle. Ark moved the remaining 1,700 troops across the grounds and arrived near the gate.

“Hey, what the?”

“How on earth did those guys.....?”

The alliance members around the castle fell into a state of panic. It was natural since the Dark Eden members who were gathered outside the gate suddenly appeared inside. But they were experts which had maintained the territory for 1 year and quickly recovered.

"I don't know the situation but it is too late for it to change!"

"There's no need to panic. We have 1,000 colleagues inside the castle and 1,500 outside the gates!"

"If we endure for a bit then Raiden and Gwen will come to help!"

"These guys don't have a lot of people!"

The alliance members quickly got into a defense formation. Now there was only 50 meters between the 1,700 Dark Eden members and the 1,400 Hermes alliance members. Ark ran forward and raised his voice.

"Eat all your food! Lariette-nim, use your set of 3 attack buffs!"

The Dark Eden members simultaneously took out their dishes at Ark's command. Lariette opened her arms and a white light spread through the area.

"The great warrior's soul..... Soul's Disposition, Warrior's Concentration, Storm Breathing!"

Soul's Disposition raised attack by 10%! Warrior's Concentration increased the probability of a critical hit by 20%! Meanwhile Storm Breathing increased the attack speed of sword related weapons by 10%! When armed with 3 different attack buffs and food, their stats rose quickly.

"Pierce through the enemies! Blade Tempest!"

Ark exploded a magic sword and plunged towards enemy lines. At the same time, Dark Eden and the Hermes alliance members collided. It was 1,400 people against 1,700 people! There was a roaring sound like a thunderbolt when the 3,000 troops collided and a fountain of blood



spouted upwards. It was like a situation where two tomatoes held in both hands were smashed together. The pressure from both sides caused bleeding among the soldiers. Shorted after both sides collided, the two groups seemed to stop moving.

Kkukukukukuk!

The warriors raised their shields after both sides collided and it became a contest of strength. The atmosphere was just like before a volcano exploded. The swelling lava caused cracks which seemed like they could break apart at any point. While the warriors were having a standoff, the magicians and archers were using ranged attacks to break through.

“Racard, check the arrangement of the enemy!”

In this standoff, the first enemy who managed to hit the opponent with long-ranged attacks would win. In a conflict like this, it would be difficult to find the location of the archers and magicians to intercept them. But the magicians and archers in Dark Eden were easy to see by the Hermes members on the wall. It was the reason why he sent Racard to the gate beforehand.

“There are 50 archers and 20 magicians on the right side. 50 metres to the rear of the troops in the 3 o’clock direction are 80 archers, 30 magicians. While on the left wall there are 60 archers and 15 magicians.....”

Racard explained the location of the enemy troops to Ark. After Ark heard the reported, he handed the information to the long range attackers in Dark Eden.

“All archers and magicians in Dark Eden, focus your attacks on these coordinates!”

“Burning flames of anger..... Rage of fire!”

“Thunderbolt!”

The magicians simultaneously hurled magic at the coordinates Ark mentioned. The archers also shot arrows towards the magicians who were chanting spells to interrupt them. Thanks to Racard's information, they were able to pinpoint the location and destroy 40% of the enemy's long ranged attacks. With the burden of a long ranged counter attack eased, Dark Eden started to earnestly attack the enemy. The balance had tilted in their direction.

"Now's the time. Take this! Dark Blade!"

Ark plunged into the enemy lines which had started to crumble and shouted. Dozens of people followed Ark recklessly and lost their lives. However, Ark had no time to worry about them. In a fight of 1,700 vs. 1,400, there was no time to look back. Ark had to attack the gate so forcefully to subdue it in time. Ark had invested a lot of gold into this so time was of the essence.

'If Gwen's assault troops return then Dark Eden's 1,700 troops will quickly crumble!'

That's right. Dark Eden was able to have a numerical advantage because Gwen had led the 1,500 troops out of the castle. Even if there were casualties from the trap, there were still 1,300 troops remaining. If they returned to the castle then Dark Eden wouldn't be able to endure. So he had to penetrate the enemy line no matter how many troops he lost.

'There are also the 1,000 Hermes troops left in the castle!'

That was the reason why Ark had 800 troops check to see if they moved. If those troops attacked as well then Dark Eden would never win. So his 800 members would block the troops inside the castle for the moment. And.....

"Assault troops, gather your power and charge! Victory or defeat hangs on this charge! Rush!"

Ark led Dark Eden in a wedge formation. The head of the wedge formation was Ark and Shambala!

“Take this, Dark Blade!”

“Torrential Sword!”

Ark and Shambala used their skills, causing the leaders of the enemy to stumble. Thanks to that, Dark Eden managed to penetrate the enemy.

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

It was the feel of pushing through a hard shell! Once the shield unit of the enemy troops collapsed, Dark Eden quickly managed to reach the gate.

“That’s it. Now take a defense formation on the left and right. Open the path for the engineers!”

The assault troops moved at Ark’s order. They drove the enemy to the left and right side, clearing a path to the gate. Then the raccoon engineers who had been waiting ran through with some big planks. They then placed the boards on the gate and began to nail them in at a quick speed.

“What is going on?”

“Those guys are repairing the gate?”

The enemy said in a confused voice as they stared at the actions of the raccoon engineers. Then an alliance member flinched and shouted.

“They’re not repairing it. A wall! They’re trying to block the gate!”

“T-then the reason they attacked the gate.....?”

“You finally understand?”

Ark laughed as he swung his sword. That’s right. The reason Ark had rushed and sacrificed some troops was for this. It was to seize the gate and build a barrier before Gwen returned. During the Lancel defensive war, he had the raccoons built the barrier on the spot to save time. Thus the raccoons were carrying a barrier like that as they approached the

gate. The pieces were quickly assembled and the gate soon became a wall. Gwen who had returned to the castle after being hit by the traps had run into this barrier.

“Damn, smash it!”

Gwen yelled from outside the gate as she finally figured out the situation.

‘Huhuhu, this barrier is different from the hastily built ones used during the Lancel war. It is a special barrier that I paid 4,000 gold for. It isn’t something that can be broken with swords. And this barrier also receives the protection of the Defense Towers.’

That’s right. This was the reason why Bread and Redian hadn’t attacked the Defense Towers properly. The barrier that the raccoons built had become a part of Silvana’s architecture. Thus the Defense Towers bonuses like increased and auto recovery was applied to it. Now that the barrier has received the protection, without any siege weapons Gwen would take many hours to smash it.

“It’s a success! The mackerel pieces gamble!”

Ark shouted as he looked at the finished barrier. That’s right. The strategy Ark came up with for this siege was the Mackerel pieces gamble. In fact, while preparing for this siege the thing he was most worried about was a full-fledged war. This was because the Hermes alliance was superior to him in numbers and other aspects. If there was a full-fledged war then his chances of winning was only at 30~40%. Even if he used the tunnel no. 1 as a surprise attack, he only had a 50% chance of winning.

‘The odds aren’t favourable. This war was one with my life at stake. I need to increase the odds to at least 80%!’

So he came up with the mackerel pieces gamble. The first part had Ark and the rehabilitation members destroy the gates to draw out Gwen’s troops. This was the first step. Then Ark used tunnel no. 1 to seize the

castle gates. But there was one problem with this. It was Raiden and his 1,000 troops waiting inside the castle.

‘However, Raiden won’t move!’

The reason Ark thought like that was simple. At this point, Ark and the 2,500 Dark Eden members had already broken in. If he left the castle and joined the Hermes troops outside to make it 2,400 then it would be risky since the enemy could enter the castle. Therefore Raiden decided to wait until Gwen came back. Raiden never imagined that Ark would block the gates. Raiden and Gwen were unable to expect Ark’s plan. Ark had taken advantage of that to separate the Hermes alliance’s head, body and tail. It was like a mackerel which had been cut into pieces! And Ark’s strategy was a success. But the strategy didn’t have a 100% chance of succeeding.

‘If the castle forces joined the troops on the grounds before Gwen entered then everything is screwed!’

That’s right. The mackerel pieces gamble would encounter a big problem if the head, Raiden and his 1,000 troops, joined with the tail, the 1,400 troops on the castle grounds. The important thing was the body, Gwen and her 1,300 troops. If the head, body and tail joined up then the plan would surely fail.

‘How will the desperate Raiden combine with the body now?’

Ark’s eyes flashed.

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“Oh my god.....!”

Ark looked over towards the castle. Raiden was watching the gate from the castle with confusion.

“What did it start to go wrong?”

Raiden said as he couldn't understand the situation. When the siege started it was 4,300 against 5,600. No matter how they looked at it, the Hermes alliance had the overwhelming strength. The Hermes alliance also had the Defense Towers and the walls. With this much advantage, it should've been easy. Nevertheless, Raiden didn't feel relieved.

'The opponent is Ark. That fellow has managed to turn a sure-fire defeat around before. He has a strange amount of luck in decisive moments.'

It was unnecessary to say but Raiden had a lot of pride. Ark was a strong guy with a lot of luck when it came to decisive moments. When thinking about the past, he couldn't feel at ease even if his forces were clearly dominant. That's why Raiden stayed inside the castle. Ark knew that he was at a disadvantage when applying for the siege! If he moved outside then he feared he was just playing into Ark's scheme. If he just stayed inside and defended like a turtle then Ark's schemes would be no use. And everything had progressed as Raiden expected until now.

"But what is this?"

Raiden shouted as he punched the wall. How could Dark Eden enter the castle grounds when the gate was tightly closed? Raiden didn't know about the existence of the no. 1 tunnel so he couldn't understand the situation. No, in fact he hadn't thought it was necessary to understand. Dark Eden only had 2,500 troops. On the other hand, Raiden believed that he had 3,900 troops. When Gwen's troops returned to the castle, they could just surround Dark Eden and crush them. But that judgement was Raiden's worst mistake. If he had taken the risk and moved his 1,000 troops then Ark wouldn't have the chance to block the gate. But Raiden never imagined that the gate would be blocked and chose the 'safe victory' path. That had given Ark the time he needed to control the gate. When Gwen's troops confirmed outside the castle, Raiden was now unable to move outside the castle.

'That Ark bastard.....!'

Raiden's blood pressure soared again because of Ark. However, he took a deep breath and pushed down the anger.

"I have to maintain a steady state of mind. If I become mad then I'll just keep getting played by Ark. Yes, I have to be calm. Ark is used to playing cheap tricks but if I think about it carefully, nothing is really disadvantageous for us. Even if the troops on the castle grounds are wiped out, we still have a lot more."

Raiden calmed down and thought about the situation. The Hermes alliance was certainly at a disadvantage when fighting on the castle grounds. However, they were one of the 5 powers in Nagaran. Dark Eden also has quite a lot of casualties. In addition, they've dispersed their troops so Dark Eden actually only has 1,700 people.

"Even if they wipe out the 1,400 troops, Dark Eden will still receive significant damage. When the battle outside ends, they should only have around 2,000 people left. Combined with those guys who retreated from the Defense Towers, that is 3,000 people."

However, there were 1,000 troops inside the castle along with Gwen's 1,400 troops. When combined with the 1,400 troops at the Defense Towers, that was 3,800 members. While they had been forced on the defensive from the unexpected attack, the Hermes alliance still had 800~1000 more troops.

"The problem is that is separating the troops. But if we join together then we will win. Besides, there's only 3~4 hours left so if I maintain the castle then it will be my victory!"

And Raiden knew how to gather the troops. Even if Ark had blocked the gate, it was just a temporary shield. The only reason Gwen couldn't smash it was because of the protection from the Defense Towers.

".....If so, the answer is simple."

Raiden used a Feather of Whispering on the leader of the troops in the Defense Towers.

*-When you receive this command, destroy the Defense Towers immediately and return to the castle!*

*-Huh? What are you saying.....?*

*-Gwen will explain it when you arrive at the gate.*

This was the method Raiden selected. There were two reasons Gwen was stuck in front of the gates. One reason was the Defense Towers protection while the other was that Gwen's troops were mainly composed of warriors. While there were 1,300 troops outside the gate, it was a limited area so only 100 people could actually attack the gate. However, the troops from the Defense Towers were mainly archers and magicians. If the 1,400 troops from the Defense Towers attack the barrier with magic and arrows then it would only last 30 minutes.

*"Then it will certainly be our victory!"*

In fact, Raiden was confident that he could maintain the castle with the 1,000 troops for the remaining 3~4 hours. It's because he had invested a lot of money into the defences of the castle. But this time Ark had managed to unexpectedly hit him in the back of the head.

*"I won't repeat the same mistakes. That Ark bastard, this time I'll definitely step on him!"*

Raiden's eyes started to shine with an eerie light.

## **Act 6: Impregnable Fortress**

*"Heh, it's not even near the end and those guys have already run away."*

An archer laughed as he looked outside the window. The place he was looking out from was a bunker installed in front of the Defense Tower. The Hermes alliance had used the same method Alan chose in the past to protect the Defense Towers. In other words, it was the strategy to build bunkers in front of the tower while magicians and archers attacked those navigating a minefield of traps. No, this strategy was a common strategy that must territories used. It was a classic



strategy to protect the Defense Towers. Of course, Ark had previously broken that strategy in 12 hours. However, it was only possible thanks to his raccoons digging tunnels underneath. One year had passed since then and nobody had succeeded in smashing the Defense Towers in less than 15 hours.

“To be honest I was a little nervous at this time.”

“This is the same strategy to protect the Defense Towers which Ark broke in 12 hours. Furthermore, the users commanding the units are the pioneers Bread and Redian so I was expecting a fierce battle.”

The unit attacking this Defense Tower consisted of Bread, the Wolrang and some of the Eastern Nation. They knew that Bread possessed a reckless character and tremendous attack power. However, Bread had retreated after entering the mine field and failing a few times.

“Heh, even the last pioneer can’t do anything? Even if they have 2,000 people, it will be impossible for them penetrate the huge number of traps we laid in time. They only brought 500 people so of course they can’t occupy the Defense Towers.”

“That’s right. Instead of Bread, isn’t Ark who ordered this the pathetic one?”

“Yes. After all, he only experienced the siege once a year ago. At that time the siege only had 2,000 people at most. And Ark was only commanding 83 people.”

“That standard is just child’s play.”

The alliance members relaxed in the bunkers and continued chattering. Then the garrison chief of the Defense Tower suddenly heard Raiden’s desperate voice in his ear.

*-When you receive this command, destroy the Defense Towers immediately and return to the castle!*

"He wants us to destroy this perfect Defense Tower and return to the castle? What is he saying?"

"I don't understand the details either, but....."

The garrison chief frowned and answered the questions of his men. The defenders breaking their own Defense Towers had never been heard of before. However, the garrison chief could tell from Raiden's desperate voice that something serious had happened.

"It must be because of those guys who retreated..... Anyway, clearly there was a serious problem at the castle. It might be too late if we question it, so let's hurry up!"

"Damn, let's break the Defense Tower."

The troops exited the bunkers and headed towards the Defense Tower. Then they fired arrows and magic towards the tower.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Suddenly an explosion occurred hundreds of metres away from them.

"What, what the? What is that?"

"Isn't that place the mine field? The traps? Did the traps explode?"

"Don't tell me those guys returned?"

The garrison chief flinched and turned his head. His idea was correct. Bread and the Dark Eden members who he thought had returned to the main body ages ago were walking through the mine field. The garrison chief was even more confused than when he received Raiden's order.

"What is that? If they walk through the mine field like that then they should've been wiped out long before they reached here....huk, did they increase their troops? No, the numbers seem the same. Are they just pushing through now that there's not a lot of time left?"

"Captain-nim, look over there! Those guys in front.....!"

Then a soldier pointed to where the trap had exploded and shouted. It wasn't an enemy that was activating the traps. Hundreds of animals that looked like rabbits were moving and activating the traps.

"What, what the? Where on earth did those animals come from?"

The garrison chief murmured with a puzzled expression. This was a siege battlefield. Once the siege began, no users as well as animals could enter. Yet a herd of animals had suddenly showed up? And despite their colleagues being caught by traps, why did they just continue walking forward? Were they animals that had been trained for mass suicide?

"Huhuhu, I have to admit Ark really thought of a shrewd plan."

The animals which had the garrison chief confused weren't really animals but stuffed dolls. That's right. The hundreds of rabbits which rushed onto the battlefield was an animal doll.

#### -Poco Poco Doll (General)

A deluxe doll which resembles the famous Poco Poco of the northern mountains. The texture of the Poco Poco feels very wonderful. In addition, there is a magic equipment inside which will allow the Poco Poco to make sounds and move. It also contains a crystal to record your voice. It is best given as a gift.

It was the Poco Poco doll that Ark had bought from Paradon! In fact, Ark already knew before the siege that the Hermes alliance would use traps and bunkers to protect the towers. Despite knowing that, Ark had only sent 500 troops to each Defense Tower.

'The traps react to moving objects. In other words it doesn't matter if a user, NPC or doll is the one to activate it!'

Ark thought that and bought 2,000 Poco Poco dolls from the continent. However, it wasn't important to destroy the Defense Towers. Rather, he actually wanted to protect the Defense Towers.

"If the Defense Towers are destroyed then it would be a problem."

Bread laughed as he put down the Poco Poco doll.

“Poco Poco, aren’t you named well?”

“Poco Poco, now you’re all screwed.”

The Poco Poco doll toddled into the minefield and spat out curses. In fact, Bread had quite a bit of stress piled up since the siege started. It wasn’t necessary to say, but from the beginning Bread’s purpose wasn’t to destroy the Defense Tower. He was finally participating in the long awaited siege only to be stuck at the boring mine field. So he had to listen to the Hermes members call him and Ark names like coward, etc. Thanks to that, Bread and the Wolrang’s rage went up to 120%. So he had recorded angry messages into the Poco Poco doll before sending them into the mine field.

“U-unbelievable.....!”

The garrison chief belatedly realized the situation and screamed.

“Everybody get back into the bunker! We have to stop them!”

The garrison chief commanded as the archers and magicians ran back to the bunkers.

“It is already too late. These foolish bastards!”

Keuaaaaang!

At the same time, hundreds of shadows flew from Bread’s back. It was the Wolrang who had their fury build for the last 20 hours! After releasing the 1,000 Poco Poco dolls, the Wolrang and Eastern Nation rushed towards an enemy at a tremendous rate. Then they attacked the magicians and archers escaping to the bunker. The troops at the Defense Towers consisted 90% of archers and magicians. If there were traps and they hid in the bunkers then there would be sufficient power to wipe out the enemy. However, the mine field had already been destroyed. And the troops had exited the bunker. Without the protection of the traps and

bunkers, the archers and magicians only lasted a few minutes. It was more like a one-sided slaughter than a battle.

“Now you’ll see why I’m called the last pioneer!”

Bread murmured as he broke the joints of an enemy.

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Bread and Redian had earnestly started the plan to capture the Defense Towers. The battle between Dark Eden and the Hermes alliance at the gate was also finishing.

“The raccoon clan will focus on repairing the barrier. The defense unit will stay there and protect the raccoons and barrier. The rest of the troops wipe out the enemy on the walls!”

The hundreds of soldiers gathered at the gate moved following Ark’s command. Magic and arrows flew towards the raccoons but they were protected by the shields of the defense unit. When magic and arrows didn’t work, the enemy warriors tried ‘Rush.’ ‘Rush’ was a skill which allowed warriors to pierce through shields. But Ark just thought it was ludicrous and snorted.

“Razak, show them who they’re messing with!”

Clack clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Pepepepeng, hwarrrrruk!

When Razak used Iron Fire Wall, the soldiers rushing were caught by the flames and were thrown back. Racard also wasn’t playing around.

“More warriors are rushing from 10 metres away at your 3 o’clock, magicians are chanting spells at 5 o’clock and some archers are trying to climb the right corner wall to snipe people.”

Racard reported the movements of the troops in real time. Then he listened to the report and passed it on to Shambala, Dark Eden and the Eastern Nation.

Ssak ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun also plunged onto the battlefield and used Fire Aura. When there were thousands of people on the battlefield, it wasn't easy to spot something underneath their feet. Radun also had Protective Colouration so he could go around and use Fire Aura as well as pick up items.

'Huhuhu, the three pets that I raised well are better than 100 users!'

His heart was once again satisfied as he looked at his familiars playing an active part. Meanwhile, the enemy who was concentrating on maintaining their attacks became even more violent. Now high ground was the most strategic place to attack the barrier. The most important thing to the alliance was to attack the barrier. And the most important thing to Ark was that the raccoons repair the gate. Therefore the Hermes alliance concentrated their attacks on the raccoons and the barrier. No matter how much Ark and the 800 members of the defense unit tried to protect them, the raccoons had their health slowly drain away.

'But these attacks are like fighting against the ocean!'

Ark watched the raccoons' health using Eyes of the Cat and shouted.

"Great Sacrifice!"

His bag automatically opened and 50 potions rose into the sky. The potions formed into a huge jar before scattering around the battlefield.

'Ahhhhh, my 1,400 gold.....!'

Ark shed tears like a waterfall as he looked at the scattering potions and all the money that was gone. Despite wasting money, the result was good. All the raccoons repairing the gates and the soldiers protecting them had their health increase.

-An intermediate recovery effect from the 50 intermediate recovery potions is applied to all allies within 100 metres.

<All allies will recover 600~800 health>

It was the special power of Nursing, Great Sacrifice. In fact, Ark had purchased potions and distributed it to the soldiers. Drinking an intermediate recover potion would heal 500 health. But when he used Great Sacrifice, all allies within a 100 metre area would recover 600~800 health. So Ark had purchased and separated them inside Radun in groups of 50 or 100 in case of emergencies which required Great Sacrifice. It also had the effect of stopping the warriors from overusing their recovery potions.

“U-unbelievable.....!”

The Hermes alliance members muttered as they saw Dark Eden’s health recover. The battle had already lasted for 1 hour so most of the high priority priests were already dead. Now health couldn’t be expected to recover any more and they would have to survive with their remaining health. But after seeing the troops in front of the gates recovering in such a way, the alliance members felt their motivation decrease.

“This is the chance to win the battle on the castle grounds.

Ark smiled as he looked around the surroundings. In fact, Ark had predicted that the battle would go like this. Dark Eden had a lot of troops thanks to the mackerel pieces strategy but Ark’s main priority was to protect the barrier. Therefore he had left the 500 members of the defense unit at the gate to protect the raccoons and the barrier. In the end, there was only a 200 difference between the numbers of Dark Eden and the Hermes alliance. Furthermore, the hastily put together Dark Eden had less experience than the Hermes members. It wasn’t a favourable situation. But in the actual battle, Dark Eden had one-sidedly pushed the Hermes alliance. The reason Ark placed the defense unit at the barrier was because the Hermes alliance would also concentrate their attacks on the barrier. And the second reason was that Dark Eden’s weapons and defense was stronger.

“What? Why are level 250 users so strong?”

The Hermes members were confused after colliding with Dark Eden. It was natural. In fact, the weapons and equipment Dark Eden were using was the cursed japtem from Seutandal. After absorbing the demonic energy, the cursed japtem was 2~3 times stronger. There was the penalty of having low durability but that didn't matter in the short term. So Ark gave all the soldiers who participated in the battle on castle grounds the cursed japtem. Thus Dark Eden could dominate the battle early on.

‘Moreover, there are two people who have a large effect.’

One person was Shambala who was capturing the walls with the Eastern Nation. The other one was Isyuram.

‘Teacher playing such a huge part is completely unexpected.’

Ark looked away from Shambala towards Isyuram. In fact, Ark hadn't expected Isyuram to play a huge role. In reality, Isyuram was a strong man in Korea's police force. But in the game he was just a merchant. He might've changed professions but he was still a merchant. A merchant participating in battle would die straight away. However, Isyuram displayed just as much combat power as Ark and Shambala when the battle began. The reason for that were 2 skills that he received when he changed professions.

-Stat? Buy it with money! (Beginner, Passive, Profession exclusive skill):  
A skill of Kuronil's which gives a merchant the abilities of a warrior.

When the merchant who has this skill pays a certain amount of money to the 'Brave Gold Pig', an artifact of a Battle Merchant then they can switch one stat for another one for 1 hour. The amount of stats that can be converted depends on the amount of gold paid. However, the stat conversion can exceed 80%.

<You can change 10 stats for every gold paid for 1 hour>



As a merchant, most of Isyuram's stats were concentrated on intelligence, wisdom and luck. Even if he changed to a dual profession, it was meaningless if his stats were the same. Stat? Buy it with money! was a skill to fix that weak point. When the battle began, Isyuram had used hundreds of gold to convert his intelligence, wisdom and luck to strength, stamina and agility. Well, even if he switched stats then it was still equivalent to a warrior's stats. No even if he used hundreds of gold and switched 80% of his stats, it was still less than a warrior's. That was the limitation of having a dual profession. But that increase in stats made all the difference to Isyuram. When just comparing combat ability, his was obviously superior to everybody participating in the siege.

'If the stats are at a similar level than almost no users can match Teacher.'

However, not even Ark realized that Isyuram had another skill which had a significant impact.

-Can't live with a loss! (Beginner, Passive, Profession exclusive skill): A skill born from a merchant's spirit which cannot stand the loss of money.

When a user under the effect of 'Can't live with a loss' is attacked by an enemy, there is a 50% chance to absorb the damage and reflect 10% of the shock back to the enemy.

<50% chance to reflect 10% of the damage to the enemy>

The skill 'Can't live with a loss!' was created to help merchants in battle. It wouldn't show a big effect for other users.

'50% chance to reflect 10% of the damage is a pretty decent skill.'

Ark thought as he confirmed the skill information. However, there were secrets that even Ark was unaware of hidden in this skill.

"Ugh, what the, what is this? Aaaagh!"

A user who attacked Isyuram suddenly clutched his chest and screamed. The reason for that was 'Can't live with a loss! It was a skill where the user received some of the shock back. Despite reading the information

window, 'Can't live with a loss!' wasn't simple a skill which reflected damage. The pain which Isyuram felt when he was hit was reflected back to the enemy. The problem was that Isyuram felt 100% of the pain. In other words, Isyuram would really feel the pain if he was cut by a sword. Isyuram only reflected back 10% of the pain so it was 1/10th what he felt. But this was a game so the users who experienced pain for the first time screamed and rolled across the ground. Then they became too terrified to attack again.

"What the, this guy?"

But Ark was unaware of Isyuram's settings so he couldn't understand the reaction of the users. Anyway, thanks to Stat? Buy it with money!' and 'Can't live with a loss!' Isyuram was able to go deep into enemy lines without really being bothered. So Isyuram and Shambala pierced through and scattered the enemy lines.

*-Ark, we've occupied the Defense Towers. The rest is up to you. Make sure you finish it cleanly.*

Suddenly Bread's voice flowed into Ark's ear.

"That's it. I've finally grasped the 2 Defense Towers!"

Ark was now sure of his victory in the siege.

'The hardest part is over. With the Defense Towers in my hand, Gwen will never be able to smash the barrier in the remaining time. Now I just have to finish the last part of the mackerel strategy.'

That's right. The mackerel pieces strategy couldn't be completed if the Defense Towers were still occupied by the Hermes guild. No matter how much the raccoons repaired the barrier, it wouldn't last for several hours if the Defense Towers were destroyed. Of course, if it received a concentrated attack then it couldn't endure for a long time even with the protection of the Defense Towers.

'But after overpowering the troops on the castle grounds, the barrier will be able to withstand Gwen's attack for 3 hours.'

That's right. It hadn't been necessary to use 18 hours for the tunnel strategy. But this was the reason why he only started the strategy after 18 hours despite his troops taking damage. The siege finished after 24 hours. Even if he managed to capture the throne, if Gwen's troops pierced through the barrier before the siege ended and attacked the weakened Dark Eden then the result would be unpredictable. However, now there were only 2 and a half hours remaining. With the Defense Towers controlled, Gwen wouldn't be able to enter the castle before the siege ended. He didn't have to worry about that anymore and could concentrate on capturing the castle.

"The Defense Towers are now controlled by us! Annihilate all of them!"

"Waaahhhhhhhh!"

The spirited Dark Eden shouted and rushed towards the Hermes alliance. After a while, Dark Eden finally controlled the castle grounds and occupied the walls.

"The enemy has been completely destroyed!"

"770 people have been killed!"

1,400 alliance members dying compared to 770 Dark Eden members was quite good. This meant he had 770 troops remaining. When added to the troops keeping an eye on the castle, it was 1,730 people.

'The raccoons still have to repair the barrier due to Gwen's attacks so I should leave 400 troops here. That leaves 1,330 people. It should be enough to control the castle in 2 hours!'

"Now it is the final battle. Head to the castle!"

There was no reason to delay any longer. Ark led 530 troops to join with the ones at the castle. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members rushed towards him when he arrived at the castle.

"Ark, has everything on the castle grounds been cleaned up?"

“Yes, Bread and Redian have occupied the Defense Towers.”

“Then this is the only thing remaining.”

JusticeMan looked at the castle and nodded. A battle was still occurring in front of the castle. JusticeMan and the 800 troops had been shooting arrows at the windows while the Hermes members inside also shot arrows and magic at them. Despite fighting so much while Ark was controlling the outside, there were almost no casualties. The reason was the structure of the castle. In fact, the actual castle was more difficult to capture than the grounds. The castle was completely covered from the ground all the way up to the roof. The windows were the only place which connected it with the grounds. Just like the walls outside, troops could be placed at the windows to attack. Yes, the castle was a strong defense just like the walls and the courtyard. In addition, the defense of the castle was better than the walls. Usually attackers could enter the castle after the Defense Towers were destroyed. But this time the Defense Towers were perfectly fine. And Dark Eden didn't have any siege weapons.

‘It is the same situation as Gwen who is stuck outside the gate.’

Unlike Gwen, Ark absolutely had to capture the castle to win. While Gwen needed 2 hours to break the barrier, presently Dark Eden required triple that time enter the castle. It would take at least 6 hours.

‘But.....’

Ark smiled and opened his bag. The item he took out was the Phantom Hourglass which he had used to break the gate! The reason said he could capture the castle in 2 hours was because of this Phantom Hourglass.

“Now shall I get started?” Shield troops, advance and raise your shields!”

Magic flew from the windows of the castle but the attack wasn't enough to be a problem. They could only attack outside using the windows, so even with 1,000 troops only 50~60 people could actually attack. Ark blocked the attack of the enemy using the shield unit and arrived at the

castle door. When he used the Phantom Hourglass, the door instantly became tattered.

“Now, hit the door with your blunt weapons!”

Then the shield unit took out their maces and warhammers. And they battered the rotted door.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kakang, kakang, kakang!

But why was there only a metallic sound as the mace and hammer bounced off?

“What the, this is? How.....?”

The confused question emerged from Ark’s mouth. After all the rotted parts had fallen off, another huge iron door seemed to appear behind it. The Phantom Hourglass had influenced the target. Then the wall behind it had also been influenced. Yet the iron door looked just like it had been newly made despite the 500 years acceleration.

‘What on earth is going on?’

Ark made a confused face.

“T-this....? M-mithril. The entire door is made of Mithril!”

A dwarf warrior cried out. Ark instantly felt like the dwarf had hit him in the head with his warhammer. Mithril..... Anyone who was interested in fantasy knew about mithril. Mithril was a magic metal that only a dwarf could smelt. It was a dozen times stronger than steel and had high magic resistance, so it was widely regarded as a deluxe material. But mithril’s best feature was that no matter how much time passed, it wouldn’t rust and would actually become stronger. In other words, using the Time Acceleration of Phantom Hourglass had actually caused the door to become stronger.

“Oh my god.....!”

Ark's mood became dark at the thought. Ark had given up the siege weapons and wasted 18 hours because he had confidence that the Phantom Hourglass could get rid of the door. But who would've imagined that the Phantom Hourglass would affect the impervious mithril door? Mithril was an expensive material where one ingot would cost 10 gold. He could get at least 2,000 gold with just a bit of the door. In other words, it was a 20,000 gold door. He honestly thought it was madness. But that madness had caught Ark's ankle and held him tight.

'Of course I can destroy it if I concentrate attacks on it.....'

The problem was time. Ark had calculated the time required to maintain the barrier and wasted 18 hours. He had spent 3 hours occupying the grounds so now the remaining time was 2 and a half hours. Furthermore, he had believed in the Phantom Hourglass and blew the siege weapons up. Without the help of the siege weapons, it would be impossible to destroy the mithril doors in a couple of hours. The door even received the protection from the Defense Tower. Even if he destroyed the Defense Towers, Gwen would break through the weakened gate before Ark could enter the castle. If that happened then Dark Eden would become surrounded. Ark looked at JusticeMan with a soulless expression.

"If we enter the castle by the windows....."

"Impossible."

JusticeMan sighed and shook his head.

"Before you came, there was an attempt to plunge through the window. But the windows of the castle are all blocked on the inside with iron bars. Their arrows and magic can get through but people can't enter through the window. It's probably because you previously used the window."

That's right. Raiden had built the defences of the castle based on his past siege experience with Alan. At that time, Ark had jumped through a window with Alan which allowed Raiden to seize the throne. Thus Raiden installed 'Crime Prevention' windows in case something like that might happen again. Thanks to the security window, it was impossible

to climb the wall and enter through the window. Even if the windows weren't blocked, only a few people could enter at a time and they would just be attacked by the troops inside. As soon as they tried, they would be thrown out the window as hedgehogs.

"There are siege weapons on the walls. Gwen used the bomb catapults. If we use that.....

Shambala considered for a bit before pointing at the outer walls and speaking. In fact Ark had thought about that as well. With the engineers, they could seize the catapults after a certain amount of time and use it. If they used the 10 turrets then it would be possible to break the door in time. However, the turrets were on the walls and it wouldn't reach the castle door. JusticeMan grinded his teeth together.

"Did we come all the way here just to do nothing as we lose?"

"It isn't possible to do that!"

"Maybe we should just start attacking the door."

"No, that would be ineffective. Breaking the castle walls would be quicker than attacking the mithril gate."

Ark shook his head and muttered. It was true. While the door was thinner than the castle wall, it was made of a metal dozens of times stronger than steel. It would be better to penetrate through the walls than the door. Well, even if they attacked for 10 hours they would barely manage to make a hole.

'Wait? Create a hole in the wall?'

It was at that time. A desperate idea entered his head.

'Aren't the castle walls made using rock? And can't a hole be bored into the rock?'

Ark suddenly recalled some old memories. It wasn't impossible to create a hole in rock.

‘According to my memory.....’

“There is a way!”

“A way? What is it?”

The eyes of JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members, Shambala, Isyuram and Lariette all focused on Ark. But there was no room for Ark to explain it to them.

“I have no time to explain now.”

“Understood. Just tell us the necessary things.”

JusticeMan nodded and said.

“I need JusticeMan ajusshi and the rehabilitation hyung-nims to attack the castle like before so they won’t suspect anything. Meanwhile I will lead 500 troops to the secret dungeon. Racard, Razak, you guys come with me as well. Now it is a fight against time.”

They would only be able to win if they entered the castle. The problem was whether he could enter the castle during the time limit.

“.....Understood. We’ll believe in you!”

JusticeMan ordered the troops and they shot a shower of arrows at the castle. The alliance members who were stretching their necks to observe Dark Eden quickly hid their bodies behind the windows. In the meantime, Ark led the 500 troops somewhere else.

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“Don’t waste your firepower unnecessarily. Wait until they peer through the window!”

“The warriors will attack the castle door!”



The voices of JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members could be heard. Thanks to the constant arrows from JusticeMan's troops, the enemy were unaware that Ark had led 500 troops elsewhere. Dark Eden only had 830 people left around the castle. The Hermes alliance would definitely win if it continued like this so they wouldn't leave the castle to attack Dark Eden.

'Well, it's not like we're hitting the enemy.....'

JusticeMan looked at the castle and sighed. Despite all their attacks, the castle didn't have one scratch on it. Swords and arrows couldn't do any damage to the walls while the maces barely dealt any damage to the mithril doors. Of course, if they concentrated their attacks on one point then it would be damaged but if the attacks were delayed then it would just be repaired. While Ark used the raccoons to repair the barrier, the Hermes alliance also had engineers inside repairing the door.

'What is Ark going to do that can penetrate the walls?'

Frankly, JusticeMan had already 90% given up. 1 and a half hours had already passed since Ark disappeared. Now there was 1 hour left to penetrate the walls but what could Ark do in 1 hour? They also had to fight the 1,000 troops in the castle.

"It is a big deal. That Ark, he put everything he had into this siege....."

JusticeMan murmured with a pained expression.

"JusticeMan ajusshi!"

Ark's voice was suddenly heard from behind him. When he turned around, he saw that Ark and the troops were returning. But the state of the soldiers wasn't ordinary. During the one and a half hours the soldiers had disappeared, their faces had turned completely white.

"What have you been doing? How are you going to penetrate the castle walls?"

"It's over here."

Ark smiled and pointed towards where the soldiers were gathered. JusticeMan's eyes widened as he saw what Ark was indicating to. The soldiers were tightly packed together so he couldn't see it at first but then something started wriggling on the ground.

"This is.....?"

"Do you remember?"

".....That's it! I get it now!"

JusticeMan finally understood the situation. But then he spoke with a dark expression.

"Yes, I had completely forgotten about that. No, I never imagined that you would use this method. However, it is too late. There's only 50 minutes left until the siege ends. Even if we penetrate the wall, defeating 1,000 troops and capturing the throne in 50 minutes is.....

"We won't have to fight the 1,000 members."

Ark grinned and described the plan. Then JusticeMan's expression brightened.

"Ohhh, I see. Then it won't be necessary to penetrate through the walls."

"These guys can't be allowed to notice or it will be a problem."

"Leave that to me!"

JusticeMan hit his chest and shouted.

"From now on we're changing the way we attack. We will split into 3 units. One unit will attack the window continuously. While unit 1 is attacking, units 2 and 3 will wait. When the attacks of unit 1 ends, unit 2 will attack while unit 2 is on standby. It will be a rotation attack!"

It was the time difference attack that Napoleon had used before. When one unit finished pouring their arrows and magic, the next unit could immediately attack without there being any breaks. With 15 troops

divided like that and attacking, the alliance members won't be able to protrude their heads outside the window.

"Now! Follow me!"

Then Shambala and 100 of the Eastern Nation started climbing the walls. Shambala had recently changed his profession to God Killer and the Eastern Nation were former assassins. They quickly climbed up the walls like ninja. They climbed a 5 storey building in less than 10 minutes. After Shambala arrived on the roof, they hung dozens of strands of rope.

"Now, let's go!"

Ark tied something to the rope. Then he sent a signal to the Eastern Nation who pulled it up to the roof. After 6 of those packages were pulled upwards, Ark and 300 selected troops also used the ropes to climb to the roof. Thus Ark, Shambala, JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members, Isyuram, Lariette and 400 soldiers gathered on the roof.

"But can we really hit them with 400 people? There's only 50 minutes left and those guys already think they've won so they're not even bothering to look out the window. If we take a few more troops then those guys won't notice."

"This is the limit to the number of personnel that can plunge into the castle using this method. There's also no more time to move more troops. Although there are 1,000 troops inside, only around 200 will be on the 5th floor while the rest will be on the 1st floor. We should only need 300 people to capture the throne."

"I see. Then let's get started."

"Yes."

Ark nodded and sent a wireless communication towards Racard.

'Racard, let's get started.'

"Yes! Hey, Skeleton. Master said to start."

Chiii, chiii.

At the same time, the things which were dead..... The big piles of maggots started wriggling and spilling a yellow liquid from their mouths. The roof started to smoke and melt.

‘As expected from the Grub Acid!’

Ark looked at the melting roof with a satisfied smile. That’s right. The reason Ark led the soldiers to the secret dungeon was to obtain this acid. No, it was to catch the maggots which possessed this acid poison. In the old days, Ark had led the rehabilitation group and the Meow into the secret dungeon and captured up to the 5th floor. During that time, Ark had particular trouble with the 3rd floor because of these maggots. These maggots were the monsters on the level and every time they sprayed their acid, the equipment would lose 10% durability. It also melted the walls and the ground.

‘If I have enough maggots then it is possible to melt the castle walls!’

That was what popped into his head. So Ark had instantly led the 500 troops to the secret dungeon. One year ago it had taken him five days to reach the 3rd floor, but he was more than double the level now. Besides, this time he entered with 500 level 250 users! Ark quickly reached the 3rd floor and started to hunt maggots. Then he would make Razak use Death’s Equations! That’s right. Ark brought the maggots outside and made Razak use Death’s Equations. Death’s Equations was a skill which could resurrect corpses as zombies in exchange for Razak’s bones! The maggots belonged to the A rank so he had to sacrifice 18 ribs to resurrect 6 maggots. After hearing Racard’s command, Razak ordered the maggots to move. This strategy was only possible thanks to the secrets in Silvana. But like JusticeMan said, there was only 40 minutes left. That was insufficient time to melt the walls and defeat 1,000 troops.

‘But my goal is to capture the throne on the top floor. So there is no reason to fight the enemy on the 1st floor and then go up. It is before to descend from above!’

That's right. Penetrating through the wall or the roof was the same thing. If he made a hole in the roof then he could capture the throne immediately.

'40 minutes is sufficient to melt through the roof and capture the throne!'

"That's it!"

Ark exclaimed as 6 holes around 2 metres wide were created on the roof. The Hermes alliance was completely unaware that Dark Eden was above their heads.

"Let's turn on the heat!"

Ark shouted as he threw an object similar to a bee hive through the holes.

-Pepper Beehives

A honeycomb filled with black pepper made with Creative Cooking. When the beehive explodes from a shock, it was scatter black pepper around.

<The black pepper will cause any user within a 10 metre area to cough and have stinging eyes>

It was a pepper beehive created with Creative Cooking! When he threw 2 each down the 6 holes for a total of 12 beehives, the area was completely filled with black pepper. The cries of distress from the Hermes members could be heard through the holes.

"What, what the? This powder is?"

"This smell.....pepper? Where did it come from.....ack!"

"Ugh, it got into my eyes. It stings!"

"Now's the time. Fall!"

Ark and his selected troops descended to the ground below. Thanks to the stinging pepper, the Hermes alliance didn't notice until the 400 troops had descended. Then an alliance member rubbed his eyes and screamed.

"Huck! These guys, how did they.....?"

"Your reaction is too slow!"

JusticeMan grinned and grabbed the alliance member. Then he swung around and the alliance member fell in a parabola shape until he hit the ground. The alliance member who struck the ground had his health drain away. But that wasn't the end. JusticeMan grabbed the torso of the member who had fallen. It was the top mount position often seen in MMA fighting games.

"Now, let's see if you can avoid this!"

Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom!

JusticeMan's fist struck the alliance member's face like a missile. A large portion of the person's health disappeared with every hit. It was the end once caught by JusticeMan's High Class Jujitsu. Meanwhile, other alliance members were running towards JusticeMan when Bu Dong-san threw some nails and shouted.

"This is the revenge for Bul-kkun and the others!"

Throwing nails was his speciality after changing to Guardian. Shambala and Isyuram also helped JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members. And last but not least.....

"Blade Tempest!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Ark cornered some alliance members and exploded a magic sword. As Ark predicted, there were only 200 members on the top floor. With Ark

and the 400 troops he picked, they managed to wipe out the 200 enemies in 20 minutes.

“That’s it. JusticeMan ajusshi, mobilize some troops to block the stairs.....”

Ark suddenly stopped and jumped.

‘No!’

The ‘Throne of Rule’ wasn’t in the room on the top floor!

‘Why? The Hall of Glory should obviously contain the throne.....’

Then something popped into Ark’s head. That’s right. When Ark was the Lord, the throne was on the top floor. But Ark had forgotten one important fact. When Ark had been the Lord, there were only 4 floors. The 5th floor was built after Silvana increased from D to C rank.

‘Then the throne is downstairs? Oh my god, I’m screwed!’

Ark realized a little too late and shouted.

“JusticeMan ajusshi, go down to the 4th floor and seal the stairs to the 3rd floor instantly!”

“Understood. Hurry!”

JusticeMan rushed downstairs with his troops. Ark also descended the stairs and entered the room. JusticeMan and the Dark Eden members who descended first had stopped moving towards the stairs. Just looking at JusticeMan’s dark face confirmed Ark’s fears.

“You really are very persistent.”

A voice laughed from within the depths of the 4th floor. The scene was the worst situation Ark encountered today.

‘No wonder it was strange!’

Ark thought as he glared at Raiden. They had been fighting for 20 minutes on the 5th floor. Yet not one person sent a whisper to Raiden. Even after the battle was over, no alliance members went up to the 5th floor. Why? It was obvious when standing on the 4th floor. Raiden was sitting on the Throne of Rule. And the 800 alliance members were spread out in a perfect defense formation in the Hall of Glory. That's right. It was why the alliance members didn't climb to the 5th floor. Raiden had been organizing all his troops on the 4th floor. Now there was only 20 minutes left until the siege finished. There was no need for Raiden to fight Ark and Dark Eden. If Ark caught him moving troops halfway then it would cause problems. So Raiden had used those 20 minutes to move troops to the Hall of Glory and now Ark was in complete despair. Raiden opened both arms widely with an arrogant look and said.

"Good work getting here. I recognize your efforts. Coming here with 4,000 hastily constructed troops, you definitely are a strong fellow. But there is no meaning if you can't control the throne. Now I'll give you a chance. You have 20 minutes to try and snatch it from me!"

'That bastard.....!'

Ark grinded his teeth together as he glared at Raiden. But this battle couldn't be won with anger. Raiden had 800 people while Ark only had half that number. And unlike the 5th floor, the Hall of Glory had strong defensive lines which were difficult to slip through. It was impossible to break the defensive lines and reach the throne in 20 minutes. Even if he gathered the remaining troops and brought them inside through the roof, they wouldn't be able to defeat all 800 people in 20 minutes.

'I can use Area Declaration and the Divine Skill.....'

But the range of Area Declaration was 100 metres. The Hall of Glory was around 150~200 metres long. Even if he used it at the start of the defense line, it wouldn't reach towards the throne. Furthermore, Hermes was a top alliance so there would definitely be 4~5 people who changed to a 2nd stage profession. If they used Area Declaration then his would disappear.



‘Even if I use Descent of the Fire Draconian and defeat 800 people, it will be impossible to reach Raiden. It isn’t possible to penetrate the lines and sit down on the throne.’

He was stopped at the very last moment.

“What happened? The guy who is always running wild is now quiet. 5 minutes have already passed so you only have 15 minutes left. Won’t it take some time to reach here?”

Raiden smirked and taunted.

‘That bastard’s face.....no, wait? Right now I only have 330 people?’

Then Ark suddenly felt a flash in his head. Ark looked at the enemy’s defense and smiled coldly.

‘That’s right. There is that method!’

Ark suddenly had a brilliant idea in this desperate situation.

‘But that method requires several prerequisites. One is to gather the enemy troops in one place. The problem is we’ll also take some damage. If the operation 100% succeeded then he could wipe out the enemy. In order to succeed, our troops have to enter!’

Ark’s eyes brightened as he turned his head and whispered towards JusticeMan.

“JusticeMan, please gather the troops outside and bring them to the roof.”

“What? But there are only 15 minutes remaining. We’ll only be able to get several hundred people on the roof at most during the time limit. In addition, we need to fight the 800 troops as well.....”

“It doesn’t matter.”

Ark laughed confidently. JusticeMan looked at Ark and nodded.

“I can tell by your expression that you have a plan. I understand.”

Then JusticeMan sent a whisper to the soldiers outside and moved troops to the roof. Anyway, all the alliance members were gathered on the 4th floor so there was no problem moving the troops.

‘Now I have to tell Racard.....’

Ark contacted Racard and earnestly started his plan. No, he was about to start. If this operation succeeded then he could capture the throne. Then why was there something weighing on his mind?

‘Wait..... Currently we’re in the middle of a siege. I was able to move all the Dark Eden troops to the roof because the Hermes members are gathered on the 4th floor. Nobody is interested in the castle door anymore. Maybe..... ‘This is a chance!’

Ark had a sudden idea to make some money. Then he raised his head and communicated with Racard.

‘Racard, tell Razak to move the maggots when I tell him to.’

After relaying the plan to Razak through Racard, Ark released and then resummoned Racard to the castle. And he gave some special directions to Racard and Radun. Those instructions were.....

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“Kikikiki. As expected of Master.”

Racard giggled and kicked the maggot.

“Now you stupid maggot. Quickly get started!”

Racard was standing in front of the castle door. Then the maggots started to crawl to the door. And they started to rub the hinges of the door connecting it to the war with the acid. Even the hinges were made of mithril but the acid of the maggot melted it instantly. After a few moments, all the hinges had melted and the door shook. Then it fell to the ground with a loud noise. Although it fended off hundreds of

attacks, with the hinges melted it was just a chunk of metal. Racard had managed to remove the door in just a few minutes. However, the door had nothing to do with winning the siege. There was no need to get rid of the door because Dark Eden's troops had already moved to the roof. Then why was Racard removing the gate?

"Now it's your turn. Radun."

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Racard withdrew from the door. Radun licked his tongue and approached the gate. Then he opened his mouth and started to swallow the whole door.

That's right. These were the special instructions Ark gave to Racard and Radun. Ark's purpose wasn't to get past the door but the door itself. Ark had devised a strategy where he could definitely obtain the throne. Then he had thought of this while relaying the necessary instructions. It was an enormous treasure which no one would've thought of obtaining. It was a mithril door worth 20,000 gold.

'A mithril door worth 20,000 gold is a huge treasure. It is a waste to have such a huge treasure defending the castle! If he won the siege then he would be the Lord, but he wouldn't be able to remove the door even if he became the Lord. But if it is lost in the midst of the siege.....!'

That was Ark's thought.

'If I sell the mithril door then I can get back the money I borrowed from Lancel village! And no one from the Hermes alliance or Dark Eden is paying attention to the door. It is the perfect chance to steal the mithril door. I can't miss this opportunity!'

The ending of the siege was a serious situation. Even in such circumstances, Ark was still thinking about earning money from selling the mithril door. Anyway, all the Hermes members were on the 4th floor so there was no one to interfere with Racard. After coming up with the idea, Ark had Racard take one maggot and move to the 1st floor. And

the maggot was used to melt the hinges. So he obtained the 100% pure mithril door. The size of the door didn't matter to Radun.

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak!

Radun flicked his tongue and quickly swallowed the door. So Ark's assets increased by 20,000 gold. Moreover, this money was an income that no one but Ark knew about.

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"Master, it was eaten!"

'Okay, all of you have achieved 400 points!'

Ark smiled and rewarded his summons. Thanks to his pets' covert operation, Ark had obtained the treasure of the mithril door. It was a 20,000 gold treasure.

'Now there's only 8 minutes left. I've collected the door and the preparations are finished so shall I capture the throne?'

Ark took one step forward and glared at Raiden.

"Bah, you chatter too much."

"Are you still going to do something?"

"That's right. And there's no way you can stop me."

".....Nonsense!"

"You think I'm talking nonsense?"

Ark smiled and stretched out his hand.

"I'll pull you down from that spot within the next 5 minutes!"

Raiden started to become nervous after hearing Ark's confident tone. Raiden knew Ark was someone who managed to come up with

brilliant ideas in decisive moments. Of course, he was completely sure there was no win for Ark to win. But his uneasiness couldn't help increasing.

'That reminds me, he has a skill to evade other people. That's right, he'll probably use that skill in this situation. He probably intends to pierce through the defense lines and sit on the throne just before the siege ends.'

"Gather close together! Don't let even a needle slip through any gaps!"

The alliance members formed into one large group in front of Raiden in the Hall of Glory. Ark hid his smile and shouted.

"Now's the time. Dark Eden, charge!"

"Waaaaahhhhh!"

They all plunged towards the alliance members. Noisy cries and the sound of metal clashing sounded throughout the Hall of Glory.

Raiden's face became slightly tense at the assault. However, within a few minutes that tension changed to a complacent smile. Despite being attacked, the defense formation of the alliance was unshaken. Now there was only 3~4 minutes left, so even if Dark Eden had thousands of troops they wouldn't be able to penetrate the 800 strong defense formation.

"Kukuku, this must be their last desperate struggle."

Raiden looked at the land outside the window and laughed. Then he looked back towards Ark as he wanted to see it change to despair.

"What, what the?"

A baffled exclamation fell from Raiden's mouth. He was certain that Ark had no chance to win in this situation. But rather than despair, Ark actually had a confident smile on his face? After seeing Ark's face, he felt a strange sense of misgiving. Then that sense of misgiving became a reality.

"Now!"

Ark shouted as he rushed towards the alliance members. The NPCs within Dark Eden swiftly withdrew while the users surrounded the alliance members in a circle with their shields. What were they trying to do? Raiden looked at the scene with an expression that indicated he couldn't understand.

Tengkong, ku ku ku ku, ku ku, ku ku..... Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a weird sound and something suddenly fell from above them. It caused a tremendous shock and impact which shook the castle! The Hall of Glory quickly filled with dust which blurred everybody's vision. After the dust finally sank, Raiden gaped with his mouth wide open. It was impossible. The crowd of 800 alliance members and 200 Dark Eden members had disappeared. And 500 different Dark Eden soldiers had taken their place.

"If you're wondering where they came from....."

JusticeMan smiled at Raiden and pointed towards the sky. Now Raiden started to understand what happened. The ceiling was open. At the moment Raiden was on the 4th floor. Instead of seeing the 5th floor when he looked up, all he saw was the night sky. There was no ceiling in the Hall of Glory. That's right. This was the plan Ark came up with.

Ark had already used 6 maggots on the roof so he used them to scrape through the 5th floor, which was the roof for the Hall of Glory. As a result, the 5th floor and roof had fallen into the Hall of Glory. The alliance members and Dark Eden members who were fighting below were all buried under tons of rock. While they were packed tightly together, at least 70 alliance members had survived. However, there were now 500 Dark Eden members in the Hall of Glory. While the NPCs retreated since they would disappear once dead, the users in Dark Eden had dropped down when the roof fell. So the 800 vs. 330 battle changed to 70 vs. 500.

"U-unbelievable.....!"

Raiden stuttered with a stupid expression. The circumstances were clear. But Raiden still couldn't understand everything. The dropped ceiling had fallen on friends and foes but it wasn't a problem since more Dark Eden members dropped down as well.

'But why did that Ark.....?'

The point Raiden couldn't understand was that one of the bodies buried under the ceiling was Ark. Of course, Raiden could guess why Ark didn't flee at the end. If Ark retreated then Raiden would definitely know something was happening. But Ark had remained and was hit by the absurd attack. In the end, Ark was still crushed by the ceiling. Ark's plan had proceeded as planned and Raiden lost 730 troops. When it was 70 against 500, Dark Eden would certainly capture the throne. It was the worst situation! But....!

"Hu.....hu, huhuhuhu!"

Uncontrollable laughter emerged from Raiden's mouth. He finally stopped laughing and said in a cold tone.

"You fools, it is the end. Even if you kill me and everybody in the Hermes alliance, it is still your defeat!"

"What? What is that nonsense?"

Shambala frowned at Raiden's words. Then Raiden answered arrogantly.

"You still don't understand? Dark Eden is just one attack group. Your leader has died so there is no one left to capture the throne!"

That's right. That's why Raiden was convinced of his victory after seeing Ark die. The only ones who had the right to sit down on the throne was a guild leader or leader of an attack group. In the case of the Hermes alliance, if Raiden died then the right would pass to Gwen who was the leader of the Silver Gate guild. The problem was Dark Eden wasn't an alliance of several guilds but one group. Because of that, only Ark had the right to sit on the Throne of Rule. But now Ark had died. Even if Dark Eden destroyed the Hermes alliance completely, it wasn't possible

for them to occupy the castle. Raiden might be dead but the victory of the siege would go to the Hermes alliance. A pleased smile spread over Raiden's face at the idea.

"Heh, too bad. It is pitiful. Because your stupid leader went and died, there is no one to capture the throne even though you were so close."

"Thank you but I don't think there's any need for sympathy from you."

At that time, someone's voice could be heard among the rubble. Raiden's face stiffened at the sight. The voice which came from the rubble.....

Ttuduk, ttuduk.

Then somebody slowly raised their body from among the corpses.

"Heok! Y-you.. .. How are you....?"

Raiden jumped like a shocked frog. The identity of the zombie like figure was Ark! Ark had been turned into a bloody rice cake among with the Hermes members by the falling ceiling. Raiden looked at Ark's face and shrieked like a crazy person.

"N-no way! Y-you're dead! I clearly saw it! You died! So why is a dead guy getting up? It's a scam! It can't be allowed!"

What are you saying?"

Ark swept dust from his head and smiled.

"Are you saying that a user's skill is breaking the law?"

That's right. It was impossible for someone in New World to be resurrected in the same place. But sometimes a skill would jump over that law. Razak's Pledge of Death skill acted like that. When Razak used Pledge of Death, his life was exchanged for his master's and Ark would immediately resurrect. When Razak died all the maggots also died but fortunately the maggots weren't needed any longer.



“Dammit!”

When Ark revived, two Hermes members cursed and ran towards him. However, it was impossible for the 70 members to break through the 500 Dark Eden members. While Dark Eden was fighting the Hermes alliance, Ark casually approached the throne.

“Wah.... Wah.... Waaaaah.....!”

Raiden seemed to have become insane from the situation. Ark placed his hand on Raiden’s shoulder and said.

“There’s no time. Will you just get off? Or do you want me to beat you and pull you off?”

“Wah, wah! Uwahhhh.....!”

Raiden grabbed the throne and shook his head from side to side.

“I need you to get off.”

Ark smiled and looked at Shambala. Shambala looked at Ark with irritated eyes before complaining.

“Damn, why do I always have this role? Area Declaration, River of Blood!”

“Hiik, Area Declaration Abarasuk!”

When Shambala used his Area Declaration, Raiden instantly panicked and used his to make it disappear. Then Ark nodded and exclaimed.

“Well done. Now it’s my turn? Area Declaration, Glory of the Night! Divine skill, Descent of the Fire Draconian!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The Fire Draconian flew up into the night sky and descended into Ark’s body.

-You have used the Divine Skill Descent of the Fire Draconian!

The <Immortal Fire Draconian> effect will be applied for 10 minutes.

\* 300 Fire damage added to all attacks.

\* Attack speed, Movement speed and Reaction rate will increase by 50%.

\* All enemies that attack will receive 10~100 fire damage.

\* Fire resistance increases to 500% and all party members' fire resistance will increase to 100%.

\* When activated, all enemies within the area will receive 1000 fire damage while 50% of the user's health will be restored.

..... Raiden turned into a barbecue. Afterwards JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members, Shambala, Isyuram, Lariette and Dark Eden surrounded the throne while Ark sat down on it. The remaining time was only 1 minute. Ark closed his eyes and counted down the remaining time in his head.

'30, 20, 10.....3, 2, 1!'

Ark's eyes flashed open. There was a magnificent drumming sound and a message window appeared.

-The time limit of the siege is over.

The person who occupied the Throne of Rule is the leader of Dark Eden, Ark. According to the rules of the siege, Ark had become the Lord of Silvana. One of the special skills of the Lord is to 'banish' all remaining enemies within the castle.

<You have acquired the territory of Silvana. Fame +6,000>

"Now all of you remaining in my home, Banish!"

Ark's voice rang out through Silvana.

## Act 7: Lord

“Eh?”

The doctor exclaimed as he looked at the chart. He confirmed the name on the chart again and muttered.

“This is amazing.”

“Is there a problem?”

“No, it’s just.....”

Hyun-woo became tense and braced himself for bad news from the doctor. Hyun-woo was currently at the hospital to check the results from his mother’s latest general check-up. It had been two months since his mother’s last check-up and nothing had happened on that occasion. But this time the situation was different. It was the first medical examination since his mother started New World. He had asked for the advice of the doctor and scoured the internet before buying the game unit but he was still worried. On the other hand, he also had some sense of expectations.

‘My mother visited Lancel using her own strength.’

In fact, Hyun-woo had planned to visit the beginner village after settling the problems in Lancel. However his mother ended up finding him in Lancel by herself. She walked on her own feet. Hyun-woo hadn’t expressed it in front of his mother but he had been deeply impressed and surprised. Of course, it was a game so even people who didn’t have legs in reality could run around. Even so, seeing his mother who had been lying in bed for 6 years walking really felt special. Anyway, his mother was living like a normal person inside the game. Hyun-woo hoped that some of that would transfer to reality. Then the doctor pushed up his glasses and laughed.

“The test results are good. Far beyond the expected range. In particular, the results of the neural response tests were wonderful. There is a 30%

improvement compared to two months ago. The 30% number is similar to how much she had improved in two years.”

“Then it’s good?”

The doctor looked puzzled by his question. Hyun-woo blushed and scratched his head before asking.

“But my mother said that she didn’t feel much different.....”

“Somebody who only knows their body when it is sick won’t be able to tell when it improves.”

While a person could check their status through their health in New World, it was difficult in reality. Wasn’t that why people paid a lot of money for a comprehensive check-up? A patient couldn’t confirm the status of their own body so they had to see a doctor.

“Just by looking at the results of this examination, it appears that playing the virtual reality game has a positive effect on Park So-mi. In Park So-mi’s case, the thought of ‘being able to move freely’ is important in her improvement. That positive thinking which stimulates the nerves is the best type of medicine for patients like Park So-mi.”

Hyun-woo had also seen similar information when searching the internet. He had prayed for such a miracle to happen to his mother but now he didn’t pray for that anymore. In fact, it wasn’t just her improvement in health that was good about his mother starting New World. It was the atmosphere around her that really made him happy.

While his mother had lived in the hospital for the last 6 years, she had always shown Hyun-woo a smiling face. Of course, it wasn’t a real smile. Hyun-woo could always feel a shadow behind her smile. But that shadow had gone away after his mother started New World. Now his mother glowed whenever she laughed. As her character, she was able to go around and meet lots of new people which caused her stress to disappear. Hyun-woo felt like the miracle had already occurred.

"In this state, you don't have to worry that much. The patient also looks quite good after I had an interview with her. However, she shouldn't play the game too excessively. The virtual reality game is good but it only has an influence on the nervous system. Even if her nervous system recovers 100%, it will be a problem if she has weakened muscles. She must practice walking in reality.

"Of course, I understand."

Hyun-woo nodded and exited the examination room.

"Ah, Hyun-woo. What did the doctor say?"

When he approached the hospital entrance, Gwon Hwa-rang approached while pushing a wheelchair. He was pushing Hyun-woo's mother who had finished her physical therapy and rehabilitation exercises.

"It was good."

Hyun-woo smiled and explained what the doctor said. Gwon Hwa-rang laughed warmly and nodded.

"I'm glad it is more good news."

"More good news?"

"Yesterday Hyun-woo became the Lord of Silvana."

"Huh? But Hyun-woo is already the Lord of Lancel."

"He'll hold both posts concurrently."

His mother looked at Hyun-woo with concerned eyes after hearing Gwon Hwa-rang's words.

"I asked Galen about what is involved in being a Lord, so wouldn't becoming the Lord of another territory be a lot more work? I think it's better not to be too greedy....."

"It's okay. At first I might be a bit busy but after a while I can leave it to the secretary."

Hyun-woo smiled wryly and replied. He had gone to all that trouble to become the Lord and now his mother was acting like he should leave it to someone else. It was reasonable. Although his mother had adapted to the game, she was still a beginner so she had no idea about the benefits of having a Lordship.

In fact, Hyun-woo still hadn't explained to his mother the details of the siege. The siege wasn't a simple thing. 30,000 gold had gone into it. That was around 300 million in cash. He had used such a huge sum of money to capture Silvana because it would give him even more money. When it was this much, the game was more like a business. There were no parents who wouldn't worry if their son poured his entire fortune into a business. His mother was still getting her health back so he didn't want to worry her unnecessarily.

"Anyway, now the siege is over....."

Gwon Hwa-rang said with a sparkle in his eyes.

"What's wrong? Why are your eyes looking at me like that?"

"I heard from Hye-sun. She told me about So-mi ssi's character."

"My character? What about my character....."

Then his mother's face abruptly turned red. Gwon Hwa-rang grinned and muttered.

"Huhuhu, So-mi ssi's character is from an old scanned photo? Now I can see how So-mi ssi looks like in high school. No, not just seeing....."

Gwon Hwa-rang had been quite excited when he heard from Jung Hye-sun about So-mi's character. His mother had never shown Gwon Hwa-rang any old photos of her because she had been embarrassed. But now he could see it in 3D view and even go on a date with her! Gwon Hwa-

rang snorted and looked at Hyun-woo's mother with creepy eyes at the thought.

"Bah, why should she deal with a smelly old man like you?"

His mother blushed and turned her head.

"Please pretend not to know me in New World. You also shouldn't visit Lancel."

"Eek? W-why?" Do you know how long I have waited for the day I could meet So-mi ssi in New World?"

"It's not exactly my high school days. Anyway, all men only like young women....."

"T-that's not true. You're mistaken. I want to see what So-mi looks like in her childhood, not the form of a young woman."

"Then why did ajusshi's eyes look so expectant just then?"

"It's a trap. Hyun-woo, you're talking too much nonsense. Am I a shameless guy?"

"Absolutely."

"Is that so? I should've known."

".....I knew it as soon as I saw that creepy look in your eyes."

"H-Hyun-woo.....!"

Gwon Hwa-rang became frustrated at Hyun-woo's words.

Hyun-woo and his mother looked at each other and laughed.

"Are you going to give him a chance?"

"Well, I don't know. I'll have to see from now on. By the way, I'm feeling thirsty after sweating so much."

Hyun-woo looked at Gwon Hwa-rang at his mother's words. But Gwon Hwa-rang was just looking away absent-mindedly.

'He didn't notice.....'

There was a reason his mother was complaining about Gwon Hwa-rang. It was to give the man a chance! When a woman grumbled, it was a chance for the man to heap affection on her and her confidence would soar. But Gwon Hwa-rang's senses were dull and he didn't notice. Hyun-woo clicked his tongue and looked at him with pitying eyes. Gwon Hwa-rang finally noticed the situation and spoke quickly.

"I-I will go. Bottled water? Juice?"

"Well, I just want a drink but if you're offering then buy me bottled water."

His mother answered with a mock pout. Hmm, as expected of a mother. She managed to make him buy bottled water from a vending machine without any grumbling. Wasn't Gwon Hwa-rang being educated without even knowing? The only thing a child could do was help his mother!

"Ajusshi, a caramel macchiato as well please."

"Eh? Ca..... What? Is it a food?"

"Caramel macchiato. The coffee shop on the opposite side of the street should sell it. Isn't that quite close?"

Hyun-woo laughed while Gwon Hwa-rang's face distorted.

"Eh? Why are you frowning? You don't want to?"

"W-who is frowning? I'm going!"

Gwon Hwa-rang stared at Hyun-woo before turning around. Then his mother muttered softly.

"I like a man who does things like this for me."



Gwon Hwa-rang flinched before sprinting off at full speed. Hyun-woo looked at Gwon Hwa-rang's retreating back and said.

"His leg seems perfectly fine now."

"Yes, isn't it good?"

"Mother will also be like that soon. Then I can see Mother walking into your wedding ceremony on your own foot. Well, ajusshi might need a little more mental education before then."

"What is this child suddenly saying....."

His mother blushed and gave him a sharp sidelong glance.

"Just things you need to hear."

"T-that.... Wait? You're acting just like your dad. You're really serious just like him. Staying in the same corner of the room every day will just age you quickly. How is it? Do you often meet these days?"

"Meet? With who?"

"Hye-sun."

"That....."

Hyun-woo scratched his head and hesitated. Then his mother looked at Hyun-woo with a serious expression and said.

".....You don't like Hye-sun?"

"That's not it, but....."

"You don't have to say anything else."

His mother interrupted Hyun-woo's words and said.

"Don't you know Hye-sun's heart? It isn't easy for a woman to express her feelings. Of course, you shouldn't reply if you're uncertain. But you also shouldn't let a woman wait too long. Do you understand?"

Hyun-woo nodded without saying anything. His mother say that he had been avoiding the situation. But Hyun-woo already knew what his mother was saying. Hyun-woo also thought the situation was difficult. He didn't dislike Jung Hye-sun. No, in the beginning he only thought of her as a sister but he recognized that his feelings had changed. The reason Hyun-woo couldn't say a word to Hye-sun was because of Kang Mi-su, or Lariette. He often talked with Kang Mi-su on the phone. Every time he talked to her, Hyun-woo felt a mysterious emotion. Until he could confirm the true identity of that feeling, he couldn't say a word to Jung Hye-sun about their relationship. It might just be an excuse but he thought it was cowardly to enter into a relationship with someone when he might have feelings for someone else. That was the reason he couldn't hand over the Poco Poco doll to Jung Hye-sun. He had decided to leave the situation until after the siege ended.

'But.....'

Things became even more complicated when the siege was over. So he once again pushed the problem of Jung Hye-sun and Kang Mi-su back.

"What did you want to discuss?"

A while later, they had returned to Hyun-woo's house and Gwon Hwarang sat opposite him.

"It's about Silvana."

"What's the problem?"

"It's not a problem right now but a potential one."

"I'm not smart. Just tell me simply."

"Defending Silvana castle."

That's right. This was the problem Hyun-woo was worried about. Unlike Lancel, Silvana was a territory that could be taken away by another alliance.

‘I can be relieved for one month.....’

After Hyun-woo’s experience, the siege rules in Nagaran had been changed. In the past, the siege only had approximately 1,000 people and now approximately 4,000~5,000 people took part. The biggest problem was the war funds needed to pay the personnel who took part in the siege. Since the number of troops had increased, he needed a huge amount of war funds for the siege. But that wasn’t the biggest problem. There was a lot of time to prepare after someone applied for a siege. But defending was the problem. An alliance could challenge a siege every fortnight. If an alliance had a steady income from the castle then they would someone be able to hold it. The problem was when someone like Hyun-woo became the Lord. He had spent a huge amount of money in order to win this siege. Thanks to the new siege rules, a new Lord had the right to refuse any siege challenge for one month after he was instated.

‘But the problem isn’t just the military funds.’

It was that he had no troops to protect Silvana. The only way to keep the territory was to continue winning sieges. But presently Hyun-woo had no troops to maintain the estate. The Dark Eden troops this time had only been convened for this siege. They then disbanded after the siege ended.

‘Until now I didn’t need any troops, but if I’m going to possess the territory then I need the minimum number of people to defend it.’

It was natural but Hyun-woo had no intention of permanently residing at the estate.

‘This is the last time. If Silvana is taken away then I won’t get another chance. I have to gain enough power in one month to protect Silvana.’

This wasn’t a choice, it was something essential. Yet another problem arose because of this. Even if there wasn’t a siege, he needed money to gather the troops. The reason was simple. When an estate belonged to a guild, the members wouldn’t receive any payment for participating in

the siege. Instead the Lord would divide the profit of the estate among the guild. It was common sense. If there was no benefit to maintaining the estate then what reason did a guild have to occupy it? So the issue of troops wasn't a problem for all Lords. If there was a lot of troops then they could keep the estate. On the other hand, a lot more money was needed to maintain them. So the castle always had the minimum number of troops needed to defend it.

Raiden might seem like he had a lot of money after maintaining a C rated estate for 1 year. But thanks to the income for 5,000 people, he actually only received an income of several hundred gold. Hyun-woo had already thought of some plans to solve that problem.

'For the moment 4,000 people should be suitable to defend Silvana.'

Hyun-woo limited the number of troops to 4,000 people. Currently, most sieges in Nagaran only took place with 4,000~5,000 people. First, some of his forces would be filled with troops from Lancel and the Eastern Nation. In fact, Hyun-woo's strategy in this siege also focused on minimizing the loss of NPCs.

He entrusted the Wolrang and Meow to Bread and Redian and sent them to the relatively stable Defense Towers. Then he had entrusted the Lancel troops to JusticeMan as rear support. Thanks to Hyun-woo's use of Great Sacrifice, hardly any raccoons died. Therefore of the 1,600 NPCs who participated in the siege, only 100 actually died. Ark was reluctant to let the remaining 1,500 NPCs leave Silvana. He had already talked about the matter with Galen. If he wanted the NPC troops to reside at Lancel then he needed to pay them as well. NPC's also needed money to live. If he wanted to borrow the Eastern Nation and Baran clan in particular then he would have to pay a certain amount every month. And if a warrior was killed in action then he would have to provide compensation to their families. But it would still be cheaper than hiring users.

'However, I have no choice but to fill the remaining 2,500 spots with users.'

In the end, he would have to create a guild.

“I want you to be a guild leader for me.”

“Me?”

Gwon Hwa-rang said with surprise.

“Yes. Ajusshi managed to employ thousands of troops from Seutandal. I think ajusshi will be better as a guild leader than someone like me who wanders around alone.”

“That might be so but.....”

Gwon Hwa-rang spoke ambiguous words as he hesitated. There were two reasons Hyun-woo wanted to make Gwon Hwa-rang the guild leader. One reason was that it was too complicated.

Hyun-woo had tried making guilds in other online games. But there were lots of difficulties after he became the guild leader. Whenever there was a small problem in the guild it was up to the guild leader to solve it. Some issues were okay but he would get a lot of headaches whenever there was an emotional quarrel between guild members. If the guild had less than 100 members then he would be also be constantly bombarded with whispers while hunting. But it was unnecessary to explain when the guild had more than 2,000 members. He was already the Lord of Lancel and Silvana so he didn't want to become a guild leader as well.

‘But Hwa-rang ajusshi likes things like that.’

He had taken charge of rehabilitating some ex-criminals so Gwon Hwa-rang was an expert at addressing complaints. He liked such things. So Gwon Hwa-rang would be the best choice as guild leader. There were also the 700 users who followed Gwon Hwa-rang from Seutandal to Silvana.

‘And if Hwa-rang ajusshi becomes the guild leader then the burden of the maintenance costs would reduce.’

This was the second reason why he wanted Gwon Hwa-rang to be the guild leader. Once again, the money which entered the estate belonged to the estate. While he wasn't the Lord, the guild leader was the same. But it was different if the Lord was a guild leader. The Lord would have to worry about the guild members who helped him obtain the estate. Any Lord of a territory would have to pay a certain amount of money to the troops as maintenance fees. It depended on the size of the guild, but the maintenance cost was around 70% of what territories controlled by a Lord who was a guild leader needed to pay. In other words, Hyun-woo could reduce the maintenance costs of his troops by 30% if he made Gwon Hwa-rang the guild leader instead of Hyun-woo.

"Well, it does sound good. Hyun-woo is the one who invested all the funds in this siege. As colleagues who suffered together to occupy the castle, we can't just give it to other guilds in the area. If we suffered all that only to lose the estate to another guild alliance then there would be a lot of complaints.

Gwon Hwa-rang nodded after listening to the explanation. However, he revealed his worries with his next words.

"But.... I..... That.... So-mi ssi....."

That was the reason why Gwon Hwa-rang couldn't easily accept. Now the siege was over. He had planned to date Hyun-woo's mother who had turned into a school girl. Hyun-woo laughed like it was ridiculous and asked.

"You really think it is possible to date my mother if you don't accept my request?"

"Eh? Are you really going to act that petty?"

"No, it's just a joke. Even if you are the guild leader, you don't have to be stuck at Silvana. The guild will only convene at Silvana when there is a siege. The siege only occurs every fortnight. Plus....."

Hyun-woo approached and whispered in a sly voice.

"If you become the guild leader then you will have 2,500 subordinates. Won't that be quite impressive when my mother sees it?"

"Ohhhh, that's right....."

Gwon Hwa-rang was completely caught by Hyun-woo's small talk.

"Well, come to think of it there is no one else who can take the position. I will become the guild leader as you requested and leave Lariette in charge of the Seutandal forces."

"You've thought well."

"By the way, where will you obtain the 2,500 people from to form the guild? Do you think it will be easy?"

"Where? From the people who will soon resurrect at the estate."

Hyun-woo smiled and replied. Hyun-woo thought to form the guild from 2,500 Dark Eden users. Once again, Hyun-woo had a month free without any sieges. The Hermes alliance used to be one of the 5 powers within Nagaran, so with the Lord changed the other alliances would be sensing prey. After the month ended, there would definitely be guilds applying for a siege.

'So I should compose the guild from people who have experience with sieges.'

However, finding users with experience in sieges wasn't that easy. Most people with experience had already joined a guild. Of course, there were some who participated as hired soldiers but the numbers wouldn't be enough. However, the troops in Dark Eden had undergone special training and also had experience in a siege. Where else could he secure 2,500 people at once?

"I like that idea too. Because it is better to join a guild which already has a territory."

It wasn't easy for general users to join a guild that had already occupied a castle. Furthermore, the current Lord of Silvana was Dark Wolf who had appeared on TV! If he made a guild proposal then they would welcome it with open arms. If they accepted then it would be good for everyone.

"Okay, then I'll take care of that."

Gwon Hwa-rang replied.

'Now I've settled the problem with the troops.....'

But the next issue was one which really caused him a headache.

'As expected, the final problem is money?'

In fact, Hyun-woo was currently being squeezed for a lot of money. One of them was the fee he promised to the users who participated in the siege. 2,700 users participated in the siege. He had promised them around 300~500 gold to each unit if the siege succeeded. There were around 25 units consisting of 100 people so he needed to pay between 7,500~12,500 gold. That was the siege success fee. He honestly thought that amount was unreasonable but he had been willing to do anything to win. So paying the troops was a desperate measure.

"Well, 5,000 gold still remains from my war funds for the siege and if Buksil sells the Immortality Pill in Paradon then that should be several thousand more gold. Although it will take some time to dispose of the mithril door, that is 20,000 gold so if I'm conservative than 15,000 gold will remain. But in the future I need more money."

Hyun-woo sighed and muttered. Once again, there was a reason why Hyun-woo had invested 30,000 gold into recapturing Silvana. It was to complete his triangular trade route between Seutandal, Silvana and Lancel. And recapturing Silvana had been the toughest challenge. Now his wallet was in a bad state from recapturing Silvana.

"The last time I checked, the price of the trading office was 100,000 gold! I need that much money. Carriages and ships are also necessary to



establish the triangular trade. A merchant fleet requires 30,000 gold, carriages needed 10,000 gold and the amount needed for daily operations is 10,000~20,000 gold. So in the end I needed around 150,000 gold to truly set it up.”

This was currently Hyun-woo’s largest worry. Of course, trading was still possible even if he didn’t buy a trading office, merchant fleet or carriages. But he wouldn’t have spent 30,000 gold to obtain Silvana if he was satisfied with such a triangular route. He had decided to establish a trading firm like the one in Silvana on Seutandal.

“If the triangular trade route truly connected, I could get 100,000 gold in a month. It will be a 100% jackpot!”

He was already earning some money from the small scale triangular route with Ark’s store in the centre. In other words, he had a lot of experience. After acquiring the qualification to establish a trading office from Isabel, he could make tremendous profit. It would be a jackpot business with a success rate of 100%! Plus he had accomplished regaining Silvana. But he didn’t have the funds needed for the business.

“Damn, it will be a jackpot only if I have that money.....”

After regaining Silvana, Hyun-woo could make the rest move forward slowly. But since Silvana was in his hand he was irritated about not being able to immediately start. He had 2 territories but he didn’t know how long it would take to save 150,000 gold.

“Is there a way to gain that much money?”

But 100 and 200 gold is different from 150,000 gold. Most users couldn’t even imagine gaining that much money.

“Even if it takes several years, is the only way to gradually save money?”

Hyun-woo couldn’t stop sighing. Suddenly, he heard the news coming from the TV in the living room. Hyun-woo listened to the announcer’s words without really thinking when he had a sudden flash in his head.

“Yes, that’s the way!”

Hyun-woo yelled as he figured out a method to obtain the business funds.

## **Act 8: Dreams Come True**

“It’s an honour to serve you again.”

The estate’s secretaries were never present whenever there was a siege. The person who greeted him with a friendly smile was Berami, the secretary in charge of managing the territory, legal counsel and the budget. The money he had freely scattered before leaving Silvana was still displaying an effect. That money didn’t just have an effect on Berami.

“The residents are also glad that you became the Lord again. After hearing that Ark-nim had applied for a siege, quite of lot of people went to the Shrine of War to pray for your victory. Everybody still remembers your actions while you were the Lord.”

‘It’s more like they remember the gold.’

Anyway, being liked by the estate’s residents wasn’t an unpleasant feeling.

“Did the former Lord have a bad reputation?”

“It wasn’t bad but it wasn’t good either. He was just a normal Lord.”

Berami pushed up his glasses and laughed.

His cynical character hadn’t changed even after 1 year. But he always showed the proper manners to Ark.

That was the power of money.

Anyway, he truly felt like he had recaptured Silvana after seeing Berami's face.

"Please stay the Lord for a long time."

"That's what I intend."

Ark replied with a smile.

"Would you like to know how the territory changed since you were last here?"

"Of course."

The competent secretary instantly handed him some files. After he took the papers, an information window appeared.

Currently Owned Territory Information Window <Lancel (Silvana)>			
【Territory】	Silvana	【Current Lord】	Ark
【Rating】	C	【Classification】	Small Territory
【Number of Residents in Territory】	13,040 people	【Residents' Bond】	980 (+98)
【Residents' Loyalty】	530 (+53)	【Territory's Gross Income】	387,000 Gold every 10 days.
【Territory's Current Assets】	120,300 gold	【Value of the Current Territory】	615,250
【Territory's Fame】	499,400	【Development】	46,650
【Development Speed】	45,950 (▽ Falling)	【Commerce】	67,570
【Civilization】	53,360	【Armament】	31,500 (+945)

* Current effects applied to the territory
<p>【Shrine of War】 Armament +30%, 'Maintenance of Peace' effect</p> <p>【Cathedral's Support】 Resident's loyalty +10%, Resident's Bond +10%</p> <p>【Mercenary's Office】 The number of mercenaries that can be hired by the estate increases. In addition, if the estate hires mercenaries from the Mercenary's Office then the costs will be reduced based on the rating (Current rating: A)</p>
* Current situation of the territory
<p>-Peace is being maintained without any problems. (Δ Rising)</p> <p>-The income of the harvest and the estate is increasing. (Δ Rising)</p> <p>-Preparations for farmland expansion, reservoir expansion in case of a flood, various facilities expansion, Silver River Bridge construction and various other public works are on stand-by.</p>

'Huhuhuhu.'

He laughed as he saw the information window. When he first became the Lord of Silvana he had no idea how to manage the territory. And he had already decided to sell it to Raiden so he had no interest. But now the situation was different. In order to prepare for being the Lord, he had meticulously read all the information about it. And he had recently become the Lord of Lancel so when he saw the information window about Silvana, he could grasp the situation with just one glance.

'Silvana is on a completely different level from Lancel.'

It was a territory with 15 villages and a population of 13,040 people! When compared to Lancel's 732 residents, it was a huge estate 20 times Lancel's size. However, the enormous difference was the income of the estate. It was a surprising income of 387,000 gold for one month, or 10 days in reality! That was 40 times the income from Lancel. It was also a larger income than other territories in

Nagaran. While Silvana had a good location, it was most impacted by the Continental Commerce Firm. The sales from the Continental Commerce Firm accounted for 30% of Silvana's income.

'The estate's income is approximately 400,000 gold while the assets is 120,000 gold.....'

In other words, it was hard for Raiden to manage the estate. If he invested the income into various projects then it would increase the value of the territory. That's why the value of the territory was more than 600,000. But Raiden was only resourceful up to there. While the estate was growing steadily, he hadn't done anything impressive like Ark with the Continental Commerce Firm. That's why Berami had called him a 'normal' Lord.

"Still, the various numerical figures are quite good. However....."

"Are you asking about the development speed?"

Berami questioned quickly.

That's right. Silvana's current development speed was 45,590. It wasn't low. The problem was that the development speed was currently falling.

"Is there a particular reason?"

"Well, I don't know the details but the Lord has had no time to properly care for the rate of development. After learning about the territory, he had unexpectedly built that Mercenary's Office and invested a lot of money into it."

'Aha, was it something like that?'

Ark was able to grasp the situation from Berami's description. Thanks to the Seutandal conquest war and the lawless port, Raiden hadn't cared about the management of the estate. Apart from the politics, he left Berami to manage the rest of it. However, it was less efficient than when a Lord managed it so the speed fell. Building the Mercenary's Office

which had no relation to development or production of the estate was also a problem.

In fact, there had been something Ark was doubtful about before the siege. In Nagaran, NPCs could be hired as mercenaries. The mercenaries could be hired for a siege. However, most territories only hired 200~300 of them. Although they had good skills, the cost of hiring them was quite expensive. Ark had applied for the siege two days before it started. He had wondered how Raiden could hire 600 mercenaries despite his financial difficulties.

‘It was due to the Mercenary’s Office.’

When he created the Mercenary’s Office, the number of mercenaries that could be hired increased. Furthermore, when the Lord hired mercenaries then the rating of the office would increase, stronger mercenaries would gather and the degree of loyalty increased. Even the hiring costs were less expensive. For wandering mercenaries, this office was like a token of appreciation. The reason Raiden built the Mercenary’s Office was obvious.

‘It was probably to hire mercenaries who he would send to Seutandal at a cheaper price.’

Despite the money piled up in the estate, that money wasn’t the Lord’s personal funds. The money spent hiring the mercenaries was from Raiden’s pockets. In other words, building the office on the estate and hiring mercenaries was to reduce the burden on his wallet.

‘It was thanks to this that he was able to hire 600 mercenaries despite the lack of time and money.’

Anyway, Ark found the information about the estate quite satisfactory. He was especially satisfied with the rating of the estate.

“As you already know, the total income of the territory is 450,000 gold. When the value, income and fame of the estate increases above 600,000, you will be able to apply to the kings of the Three Kingdoms for a promotion.”

That was Berami's explanation. Thanks to the Continental Commerce Firm, Silvana's value had already gone over 600,000. He needed 150,000 more income and 100,000 more fame before the territory could be promoted to a B class estate. And a huge bonus was given if the rating of the territory increased. The castle would become more durable and the armoury would also increase. The effects of the Defense Towers during a siege would also be greater. And finally, the Lord's salary would increase when the estate was promoted. The monthly salary of a Lord was 2% of the territory's income. However, that salary was applied every time the territory's rating increased.

In other words, if the estate's current income was 400,000 gold then that was what the Lord's salary would be based on when promoted to a C class estate. With the 2% of the income rule, the monthly salary of a D class estate was 3,000 gold and the Lord would receive 6,000 gold when promoted to a C class estate. And the Lord of a B class estate would receive 9,000 gold. In other words, in one month he could receive a salary of 18,000 gold.

'All that effort for 1 year and he had the territory taken away when a B rank promotion was right around the corner.....'

Raiden must be sitting on the floor of his room and crying right now. While he thought about Raiden, the idea of sympathizing with him never even crossed Ark's mind.

"Okay. Repair the ceiling and areas that were damaged in the siege. Don't pay attention to the budget and just restore it to its best possible state. Since there will be no sieges for a month, all projects on stand-by should begin. Our target is to reach a B rating in 3 months."

"Huh?"

Berami's eyes opened wide at Ark's order.

"As you can see, the current assets are only worth 120,300 gold."

"So?"

“Have you forgotten? We have to pay 30% of the territory’s total income as a tax to the Three Kingdoms. That is 116,100 gold. So the territory’s assets is actually only 4,200 gold. That is enough to maintain the estate. The income for the next month will be barely enough for the repairs but you want us to continue with the projects as well?

“There’s no need to worry about money for a while.”

Ark replied with a wicked grin. Ark had a reason for saying that. It was because of the ‘double ledgers’ he previously created. Ark had handed Wolkosu the ‘double ledgers’ and he had diverted some of the earning from the Continental Commerce Firm into it. When he checked with Wolkosu before the siege, the amount had surprisingly reached 1 million gold. Of course, Ark couldn’t embezzle this money directly. The reason Ark had made the ‘double ledgers’ was to prepare for when he regained Silvana again. And when the estate was promoted, the monthly salary of the Lord would increase. In the end, Ark would be the one profiting.

‘If I pour that 1 million gold into the estate then it will grow in a month!’

Opportunity would always come to those who are prepared. But Berami didn’t know those details so he still looked uneasy.

“Is there really a way to have that type of money? If a problem occurs and we can’t offer the tax to the Three Kingdoms.....”

“I told you not to worry. If I wanted then I could have that money by the end of the day.”

“I understand. Then I’ll believe in the Lord and order the materials required for the repairs as well as give the command for the projects to resume. At the end of 3 months then it might be possible to promote the estate. No, it will be promoted.”

“If there are any other projects required for the estate’s development then tell me.”

“Yes, I will.”



Berami replied with a cheerful expression.

“As expected, the estate becomes lively once Ark-nim returns.”

“I’m thankful for those words. I thought you might complain since there is a lot of work.”

“That’s impossible.”

Berami laughed and was about to walk away when he remembered something.

“Ah, I just remembered. You have visitors from the Schudenberg Kingdom.”

“The Schudenberg Kingdom? What do they want?”

Berami grinned and answered Ark’s question.

“It is better to ask them directly. Shall I summon them?”

“Yes, let’s meet them.”

After a while, three people entered the office. Two of them were knights while the last person was a middle-ages aristocrat were the uniform of the palace.

“First, congratulations on becoming the Lord of Silvana.”

“Thank you. But what brings representatives of the Schudenberg Kingdom here.....?”

“Yesterday we heard from the Shrine of War that after a lot of bravery and wisdom, you managed to win the siege and become the Lord of Silvana. His Majesty is very pleased that you’ve raised the fame of Schudenberg Kingdom. After your achievements, he had decided to promote Ark-nim to a Baron.

‘A Baron?’

Ark looked astonished by the aristocrat's words. Not long ago, Ark had become an aristocrat in Schudenberg Kingdom. Once becoming an aristocrat, a user who did more achievements (e.g. killing famous thieves, killing strong monsters that had been troubling the kingdom or gaining a lot of fame) had a chance to be promoted again. Nagaran was an area managed by all three Kingdoms on the continent. So those who became a Lord in Nagaran was granted a temporary title from all Three Kingdoms. However, Ark had become a nobleman in Schudenberg Kingdom before being Silvana's Lord. Therefore, the King of Schudenberg could be smug in front of the Kings of Bristania and the Sinius Principality. Being granted a barony was his repayment.

"Take this."

The aristocrat politely handed up a letter from the King. After he received the scroll, there were some heroic sound effects and the information window appeared.

-You have acquired the 'Peerage Bestowment Certificate.'

After received the certificate, you have become a Baron.

While you are the Lord of Silvana, you have a noble title from the Schudenberg Kingdom. After raising Schudenberg's fame through your achievements, you have been promoted to a higher status. A nobleman should always been a distinguished role model that can be respected by others. As a noble, people will always be observing your behaviour. You will also have the ear of Schudenberg's King and other aristocrats. If your behaviour is just and honourable then you will have a chance to reach a higher status. But if they are dishonourable then you can be stripped of your title.

\* As a noble title bonus, all stats will increase by 10.

\* Reputation will increase by 7,500.

\* When completing a quest given by an NPC with a noble title, your status (Honour Knight: 500 people) will allow you to receive the support

of the guards.

\* Owning 2 territories has granted you the title of 'Lord.'

-You have learnt a new Lord's skill.

The title of Lord is given to a person who possessed two or more territories. Once you possess two or more territories, you have the qualification to apply for an audience with the King. You will also have a stronger voice among the upper class citizens.

This skill will be useful when meeting many upper class residents and aristocrats.

+ Political Power (Lord Skill): This skill will allow you to take part in nobility meetings about the Kingdom as well as participate in politics.

When your political power increases, your comments will become more convincing to the King and nobles. If you manage to persuade a certain amount of nobles and the King, you can even change the laws of Schudenberg Kingdom. In some cases, your opinion will be considered when giving quests to regular users. When your political power increases, your degree of intimacy with nobles will also increase.

<Political Power +500>

It was an unexpected bonus. He received a bonus of +10 to all stats and 7,500 fame when he became a Baron. It was a higher bonus than when he became a baronet. However, Ark was most interested in the new Political Power skill.

'I can engage in the politics of Schudenberg Kingdom?'

When he thought about it carefully, it really was an enormous privilege.

It was possible to participate in politics and propose new laws or change an existing law. That is to say, wasn't it the same privileges as a congressman in real life? Korean politicians were adept at proposing laws and amendments which were favourable to them. As an example,

let's consider Ark's triangular trade route. Ark could lower the customs fee, increase the security around movement of goods, lower the tax rates etc. There were many ways to use his status to his benefit. Of course, it wouldn't be easy persuading the King and nobles to agree to his proposals. It would probably take some time and more advancement in upper class society.

'Huhuhu, this will have huge benefits.'

"Ah, I also have a message from Lord Jackson."

At that moment, the aristocrat started talking again.

"Lord Jackson? What is it?"

"The bandit group who were arrested a while ago with Ark's help have broken out of jail."

"J-jailbreak?"

"Yes, according to Lord Jackson's words they received help from outside troops to escape from jail. A group of guards has been dispatched to chase them but they haven't been caught yet. Those criminals have a grudge against Ark-nim so Lord Jackson asked you to be careful."

"Tell him I am thankful for his worries."

"I understand. I'll be going now."

The middle aged aristocrat said before leaving the office. The joyful news about becoming a Baron was soured by Jewel's jailbreak.

'Hmm, so escaping from jail is possible in New World? Well, if it is possible to attack a NPC village then there is no reason a jailbreak should be impossible. But they must have quite a lot of numbers to escape from Jackson jail.....'

Raiden's group must be the one who helped them escape. That Raiden guy is still trying to annoy me even after losing the Lordship? But it doesn't really matter that much.'

Ark just laughed and shook it off. Raiden breaking Jewel out of jail wasn't a problem now that he lost Silvana. Raiden had lost Silvana and was already branded as a villain. His circumstances are similar to Alan's in the past. Just like Alan, the alliance was also disgruntled with Raiden and left him. The Hermes alliance was scheduled for a collapse. Raiden who was deprived of Silvana and Jewel who was a fugitive were no threat to Ark.

'I can't afford to be concerned about those guys. Right now it is important to gain funds for my business.'

Ark laughed and headed towards the main meeting room in the castle. He had changed into Dark Wolf before entering the meeting room.

Buzz, chatter.

Dozens of users were gathered inside the meeting room. There were the commanders of the 20 Dark Eden units as well as JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members, Isyuram, Lariette, Roco, Shambala, Bread and Redian. After 24 hours, all users who had died in the siege were revived at the castle. And Ark had gathered them together for a meeting.

"Now, please pay attention."

When Ark walked onto the podium, the room instantly became quiet. Ark stared at the users one by one and then lowered his head.

"I first wanted to say thank you. It is thanks to your efforts that we've defeated the villains and took control of Silvana. It was only possible with everybody's help. Everybody did really well so thank you."

Ark then raised his head and said.

"But I didn't gather you here just to convey my thanks. It also isn't to give the fee I promise you."

"What do you mean?"

"Surely he's not talking about the fee he promised if the siege was a success?"

Ark tapped a table and focused the attention on him again.

"Please be quiet for a while. I'll tell you first, it isn't that I don't intend to give the success fee. I just want to make an offer first."

"Offer?"

"This suggestion is a token of appreciation for helping me."

Ark raised one finger and continued talking.

"First of all, you will all unit as a coalition guild."

"What? A coalition guild?"

The unit leaders started fussing again at Ark's declaration.

"What is he saying?"

"Well, belong to a guild which has a territory is better than another guild...."

"If we join a guild with a territory then it will be difficult to go around freely."

"That's right, it is a bit too much for me....."

Looking at the atmosphere, it seemed like 50% was for the suggestion and 50% against. Some people liked it because it was difficult to join a guild which already had a territory. However, some users didn't like that it would restrict their freedom. After chattering noisily for a while, one of the leaders raised his hands and asked.

"As you know, joining a guild with a territory is different from joining a general guild. It might be infrequent, but we would have to return every time there is a siege and if we die then we will lose our equipment. So the Lord normally gives some of the proceeds to the guild members. I

would like to know how much of the proceeds we would get before joining the guild."

".....There is no distribution of the proceeds from the territory."

Ark bluntly replied. In fact, when he first discussed it with JusticeMan he had intended to give them 60% of the proceeds from the estate. But now that idea had changed.

"What? You're not going to give us any money?"

"Is that what you call gratitude?"

The users clamoured with shock.

'Huhuhu, they've started to nibble the bait. Now time for the lure!'

"Please listen a bit more!"

Ark surveyed the atmosphere of the room with a small smile before shouting. Then he deliberately changed his expression 180 degrees and sighed.

"In fact, I've been lying to you. I spoke about justice when I requested your help in striking the Hermes alliance. Of course, it is true. However that wasn't my only purpose. My real purpose in defeating the Hermes alliance was to obtain Silvana castle."

"Well, it is natural to desire a territory....."

The users murmured as they heard his words. That's right. In fact, the users weren't that naive as to completely believe Ark's words about 'justice.' If the Hermes alliance was defeated then someone would have to become Silvana's Lord. Of course the priority would go to Ark who was the leader. Everybody knew that the Lord received considerable benefits. Then Ark looked at one of the leaders and muttered.

"Then why do you think users are so eager to obtain a territory?"

"Huh? Isn't it to become famous and obtain the Lord's fixed salary?"

“Any normal person would think this.”

“Do you have a different reason?”

“Sid, explain.”

“Yes Lord-nim.”

Sid nodded and waddled to the table. And he unfolded a large scroll onto the table. The scroll was a map of New World. On the map, there was big triangle drawn with lines connecting Schudenberg, Nagaran and Seutandal. That’s right. This map showed Ark’s dream of a triangular trade route. Sid pointed to the three corners of the triangle and said.

“Everybody please pay attention. If you look at the corners of the triangle then you might see why it is important. Yes, this place is Silvana castle where you are right now. And this is Lancel village located in the Argus Mountains. And finally this is Seutandal who surfaced a few months ago. These three areas are essential to what I will now explain.”

Sid finally began to describe Ark’s grand plan.

Currently Ark was already managing a store in Lancel. He also had the qualification to set up a trading place in Seutandal. After winning the siege and becoming the Lord of Silvana, he possessed the Continental Commerce Firm. The stores and commerce of those areas were all in Ark’s hands.

“Dark Wolf-nim’s final purpose is to monopolize the trade in these three areas. And it’s not an exaggeration to say that his goal is already achieved. Can you imagine? The profits which will be obtained when the trade is monopolized in these three areas?”

“Oh my god!”

“I-is this really possible?”



“If it is possible then the profit would be in the tens of thousands.... No, it would approach the hundred thousand.”

“Can a person really monopolize the markets in three areas.....?”

The leaders were struck dumb. Then they all looked at Ark with new eyes. If Ark really proceeded with this business plan then the obtained profit would transcend imagination. If he succeeded then he would become a game tycoon. The idea made the leaders send him mixed looks of envy and jealousy. Then Ark walked over to the table and said to them.

“I would like to share that revenue with you.”

“Hik! W-what?”

“You’ll really share the proceeds of this business with us?”

Lights started shining in the users’ eyes. Ark nodded and said.

“You might know this already from Sid’s explanation but the Continental Commerce Firm is the centre of this business. Maintaining Silvana is required for the stable operation of the Continental Commerce Firm. And I became the Lord with everybody’s help. Therefore I want to give you guys the chance to invest in this business.”

“Invest?”

“That’s right. You will become a shareholder in the business. When the business becomes profitable, you will receive a dividend of the proceeds every 10 days. But considering the equity of the investment, I’ll have to limit it to 50 gold per person.”

This was the plan Ark came up with to secure the business funds. While Ark had been troubled by the financing problem, he had heard about attracting foreign investors on the TV. At the moment, Ark had 2,700 users at the castle. He needed 150,000 gold to proceed with the business. It was an amount that was impossible for Ark who lived in a rented house. But it was different if there were a lot of investors. If 2,700 people

invested 50 gold each then it would be 135,000 gold. It seemed like a huge amount of money but each user would only have to pay 50 gold. Of course, Ark's income would decrease if users invested in the business. However.....

'It is important to start the business. If I'm providing the funds along then there is no guarantee that I can obtain the required amount in several years. However, I don't want to borrow money from loan sharks.'

There was a time when Ark had suffered after borrowing money to pay for his mother's hospital bills. It had an annual interest of 70%! If he borrowed 1 billion won then the annual interest was 700 million won. Furthermore, he wouldn't be able to receive a lot of profit when the business first began. Even when the business became stable, it would take several months to even think about paying back the interest. And if he showed weakness then the interest would go up to 100% and then 200%.

'I can't do such a dangerous thing. It would be safer to have users invest than to pay interest. If I receive the users' investment then a stable income will be maintained even if business is difficult.'

Users who invested would receive an income. However, Ark had earmarked 40% of the business for himself. In other words, Ark would receive 40% of the profits. The business wouldn't exist without Ark so nobody would protest. And the remaining 60% was for the investors. Of course, even if there was tens of thousands gold profits it wouldn't all go to the users. If there was 50,000 gold profit then only 30,000 would be returned. When divided by 2,700 people, each person would only receive 10 gold. However, the dividend was steadily provided every 10 days. If it was 30 gold for 1 month then they would receive 360 in 1 year. They would be able to receive back 6 times the investment in one year. The unit leaders also realized that.

"Isn't that quite good?"

"If I invest 50 gold then I can receive a stable income....."

“Can’t we invest more than 50 gold?”

One leader asked as he looked at Ark with expectant eyes.

“Unfortunately, the shares are limited which is why I have to restrict it to 50 gold per person. Well, if there is someone in your unit who doesn’t want to invest then that chance will go to other people.”

Ark replied. That’s right. This was the most important part in securing the investment. In fact, if Ark didn’t even pay 1 copper and received 40% shares then of course the users would be dissatisfied. But Ark never gave the impression that their money was needed to start the business. On the surface he gave the users a chance to invest in the business as thanks for their help. So the leaders thought it was natural that Ark received a 40% share.

‘And having investors will bring three benefits.’

Ark inwardly smiled wickedly.

First, they would all join the guild. Belonging to a guild which had a territory wasn’t simple, but most people would join after the promise of an income. Secondly, he didn’t have to pay a separate fee and could just pay them the dividends from the investments. Usually when a guild possessed 2,700 people, the Lord would have to pay them 60% of the territory’s income. But the dividends would increase if the business was successful so the guild members would be satisfied with the dividends. He could monopolize the 9,000 gold monthly salary. And the third reason was actually the most important.

When investing in the business, all the guild members would become shareholders. Their profits depended on the business. So they would be willing to submit to damage to defend Silvana during the siege. By drawing in investors Ark managed to get his business fund, reducing the troops maintenance fee and reinforcing the stability of Silvana. It was a huge benefit even if he had to share 60% of the proceeds.

‘It is better to start the business rather than trying to obtain the business funds alone.’

This business was Ark's final goal. Raising the 150,000 gold required to start his business would require 1~2 years. But if he used the guild then he could start the business immediately. If he collected the shares for 1~2 years then he could make the business stabilize. That was Ark's plan! Ark was a genius at collecting money.

"I'll consult with the unit immediately."

The leaders hurried out of the meeting room. After a while, they came back holding money bags. 135,000 gold was stacked on the table like a mountain! After receiving Ark's proposal, 2,700 people had agreed. The users trusted Ark thanks to Dark Wolf's fame.

"Thank you for your trust. Sid, draw up the contract."

"Yes!"

Sid quickly started to draw up the contracts.

-A Merchant's Agreement.

<Contractor: Dark Wolf= Silvana's Coalition Guild>

Dark Wolf will pay the investors 60% of the proceeds every 10 days as a dividend. The dividend is 0.022% per 50 gold.

So Ark secured his business funds. And the investors joined JusticeMan's guild 'Justice Division.'

"I admit, you really are good at tricks like this."

Shambala muttered as the unit commanders left.

"What? This is benefiting them as well. And you've also invested....."

Ark replied with a shrewd expression. Then JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members tapped Ark on the shoulder and said.

"We don't know the details. But we believed in you and invested so we want to be certain it will succeed."

“Eh? I’ve already received your gold.”

“If the business fails.....”

“Hyung-nims shouldn’t say that or I’ll have a heart attack in front of you.”

Ark jokingly replied. That’s right. Before Ark had raised the funds for the business, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members had already invested. If the business succeeded then there was no way he could leave them out. So they had gathered 10,000 gold. Thus Ark had promised them a 10% dividend. That was dozens of times the dividend of the guild members. Ark’s stake was reduced to 30% but it wasn’t a waste.

“I understand. Just wait a few months and you will definitely receive a profit.”

‘Now I’ve gathered the funds for the business. Shall I begin?’

He received 135,000 gold from the investors. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members gave 10,000 gold. He also earned 25,000 gold from disposing of the mithril door. So Ark had secured 170,000 gold to start his business. Ark used the Letter Movement and flew away to Seutandal.

“I heard from Shambala-nim. Congratulations on becoming the Lord.”

Isabel laughed and welcomed him. It was a reunion after a long time but Ark had no time to chat.

“Thank you. I’m here to buy the trading office.”

Ark paid 100,000 gold and bought the trading office.

It was the only trading firm in the centre of Seutandal. So he now monopolized Seutandal’s trade. All transactions which took place at the trading office could be manage directly.

‘Finally.....!’

Ark looked at the trading certificate with thrilled eyes.

‘All that’s left is the merchant fleet and carriages.’

Ark flew back to Schudenberg and bought large sailboats. At first he thought about purchasing a small fleet but now he had abundant funds so there was no reason not to buy large boats. Ark bought 6 A grade merchant boats. And he also bought 8 carriages. All that added up to 150,000 gold. Even when all the preparations were finished, he still had 20,000 gold left.

“I did it. I’ve finished the preparations for the triangular trade!”

He felt his heart leap after finishing the preparations. Soon those ships and carriages would bring gold back to Ark. Ark placed the carriages on the ships and returned to Silvana. Silvana’s location made it a good place to trade. Silvana had direct access to the ocean through the river so ships could easily enter.

“Sid, you will be the chief officer responsible for Ark’s Corporation.”

Even though he created Ark’s Corporation, he didn’t intend to run the business himself. He wasn’t a merchant so trading wouldn’t be useful for him. And Sid was reformed after Isyuram’s mental education so Ark could trust him with it.

“Huh? R-really?”

Sid stuttered after hearing Ark’s words. Sid was a merchant so he knew what a big scale this business was. It would be a dozen times more profitable than when he was the foreign chief director of the Continental Commerce Firm. And it would have a great deal of large transactions for a merchant. If Sid was in charge of this business then he had the chance to become the best merchant in New World. Sid grasped Ark’s hand and shook it with tears in his eyes.

“Thank you. I will work hard.”

“Huhuhu, please do that. Because Teacher, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members all invested in this business.”

Ark replied with a wicked grin. Sid became pale but accepted the position of chief officer. Sid couldn't miss this opportunity.

“Then let's depart!”

Sid saluted and left on the merchant fleet. Gold Dream. The name of the merchant fleet blatantly showed Ark's desire to the world. It was a merchant fleet that could carry up to 100,000 gold and protected by Seutandal's navy. The boats were also A ranked with 24 cannons each. When Sid boarded Gold Dream, all 6 sails opened and the merchant fleet departed towards the ocean. It wasn't simple a merchant fleet. It was Ark's dream.

‘Now New World's gold is mine!’

That was what Ark believed. A dream come true! That's right. The dream was accomplished. But it wasn't finished yet. Ark looked at the fleet that was becoming more distant.

“Now that part is finished. What now.....?”

He heard Bul-kkun ask from behind him. Ark replied with a wicked grin.

“Naturally hell training with the coalition members.”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members' faces turned dark.

## **Act 9: Into the Abyss**

“Units 1, 2, 3 and 4, disturb him from the rear! Archers and magicians should cover the assault troops. Priests should heal the warriors without stopping!”

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

The guild cried out at Ark's command and moved. While the leading warriors blocked with their shields, arrows and magic shot towards the enemy.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, pepepepeng!

The explosion of different types of magic lit up the dim environment like it was daylight. A huge presence was revealed by the light. It was a 20 metre monster with 8 arms. It was a middle ranked boss monster called Dark Hunter Baldwin. Baldwin was receiving hundreds of attacks. He didn't care about the magic and arrows hitting his body and just ran forward while using his 8 arms to attack. There was a roaring sound and the warriors' defense quickly collapsed.

"Units 5, 6, 7 and 8, use your skills to grab its attention. Meanwhile units 1, 2, 3 and 4 will retreat. Get out of its range and focus on recovery."

The units attacked it from behind. Baldwin initially ignored it but after being hit by 100 warriors using Taunt, he couldn't endure the anger anymore and eventually turned his body around. He revealed his thick fangs and roared loudly. The whole space shook from the roar! The warriors who saw the scene turned pale in horror. However, Ark just felt excited after listening.'

'This is it, this is great! It is exactly what I wanted!'

Ark's face lit up with joy. There was a reason Ark couldn't suppress his happiness after seeing Baldwin.

"Ohh, it is suffocating!"

It started a few days ago. After regaining Silvana, he had earnestly started his dream business. It was unnecessary to explain but Ark had actually been under a lot of stress.

"L-level.... Stats..... Loot.....!"

The reason for Ark's stress was his character. It had been approximately one month since the Lancel defensive war started. In other words, Ark



hadn't been able to hunt for one month. For a user, the number 1 priority was raising their level. He had been experiencing serious withdrawal symptoms which were the reason for Ark's stress.

"But now all the work has been settled. Gold Dream has successfully departed so I just have to wait for it to return....."

There was no need to go to other areas to hunt. He could gain experience in Silvana thanks to the secret dungeon. The Cradle of Ancient Evil! It was a dungeon where rare, elite monsters roamed.

"This is an opportunity to raise my level!"

While he wanted to level up, he also wanted to uncover the secret in the lowest floor of the dungeon.

"The last time I was the Lord, I only reached the 5th floor with JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members. But according to the information, the secret dungeon is many times deeper.

And the levels of the monsters become higher the more we go down, so getting experience when I'm level 383 won't be a problem. This is a monster infested dungeon and the last floor might have a hidden boss." That idea stimulated Ark's adventurous spirit even further. He also had another reason to hunt in the dungeon. Even though the Hermes alliance lost Silvana, there would definitely be a siege challenge once the one month was over. Even if he had regained Silvana, the abilities of the 'Justice Division' still paled compared to the other alliances in Nagaran. So Ark needed to raise the level and ability to fight together of the Justice Division. Fighting against elite monsters should be good practice.

After getting the idea, Ark led the troops stationed in Silvana to the secret dungeon. That's right. Ark was currently in the Cradle of Ancient Evil. His stress had unravelled after enthusiastically fighting the monsters. In the old days, Ark entered the dungeon with 80 people and took a week to capture up to the 5th floor. But now the situation was different from before. Ark's level was twice what it previously was.

With the addition of the Lancel troops, the Eastern Nation and the Justice Division, they had a total of 3,800 people. Thanks to that, they managed to reach the 24th floor in just 3 days. And Baldwin was the middle ranked boss that appeared every time after a certain number of floors.

‘As expected from a middle ranked, elite boss.’

Baldwin didn’t easily collapse from the attacks of the Justice Division. As a level 600 elite boss, his attack and defense combined surpassed imagination. But that was something else that caused difficulty for the Justice Division.

*-Ugh, you conceited humans. The guards of hell will ripe your meat and heart from you. They’ll eat the flesh of the group foolish enough to come here!*

After being hit on both sides, Baldwin punched the ground and shouted. Then the ground split and a group of 100 dogs with red eyes came crawling out. They were the guards of hell, monsters called Hell dogs. Although they were only level 300, they were still elite monsters. They were so strong that 4~5 people were required to deal with one.

“Sheesh, these guys, don’t just turn pale. The previous units, form a circle around the Hell dogs and gather them in one place!”

“Magicians, use Fire Wall around the Hell dogs.”

“Archers, shoot to contain the Hell dogs.”

“Warriors, lure Baldwin to the outskirts!”

Ark issued some orders and the leaders instantly directly their units. Despite their fear, the units began to execute the strategies in an orderly manner.

‘It was worth the running around and dying.’

This secret dungeon had a huge harvest. During the siege, Ark had issued detailed instructions but the leader often couldn’t understand the

aims and hesitated to obey. But after hunting in the secret dungeon for a few days, they had completely changed. Now the Justice Division started to understand how to move in any situation. The troops soon required 80% of Ark's tricks in battle. With 3,800 troops invading the dungeon, the battles wouldn't be a battle at all. Even if they were elite monsters, they were easy to deal with when there were a lot of people. So when dealing with a middle ranked boss like now, he divided the troops into units consisting of 500 people. Then they went around the dungeon and lured any visible monsters. The battle only started when a minimum of 100 monsters were gathered. If the battle wasn't difficult then it wouldn't be training. And only one unit participated in the battle. So there were quite a few casualties but the troops were able to learn the tricks of battle quickly. And by dividing into troops of 500 people, the time it took to clear the dungeon was considerably shortened. That's how they were able to reach the 24th floor in three days.

"Ark-nim, we've collected all the Hell dogs in one place!"

"Good. Racard, Radun, now it is your turn."

"Okay, leave it to me!"

Racard grabbed Radun and flew into the sky. When they arrived at the place the Hell dogs were gathered, Radun opened his mouth.

Ssak ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

At the same time, a large number of bee hives fell from Radun's mouth.

It was the pepper beehives Ark made using Creative Cooking! In fact, Ark didn't keep a lot of dishes inside Radun. Unlike other items, Radun would digest dishes when it was placed inside him. In addition, Creative Cooking could create poisonous dishes. There was no guarantee what would happen if Radun digested the dishes. But if Radun threw it up immediately then he didn't have to worry about it being digested. Anyway, the Hell dogs shrieked when dozens of pepper beehives flowed out. It was the impact of the pepper beehives created by

Creative Coking. The Hell dogs had a keen sense of smell so it was impossible for them not to be affected.

“Now’s the time. Exterminate them!”

“Assault troops, charge and step on them!”

“These guys are weak against Holy Power. All priests add holy power to the warriors’ weapon!”

“Magicians and archers will use their wide area skills to assist the warriors!

The soldiers let out loud cries and obeyed their unit leader’s orders. Thanks to the holy power, the Hell dogs quickly had their health drained after being hit by the swords. When the Hell dogs that were in a critical condition tried to escape, the magicians and arrows used precision attacks to kill them. Thus the Hell dogs were completely destroyed 10 minutes after they appeared.

*-Kuuuuoh, these guys.....!*

Baldwin murmured angrily as all the Hell dogs were wiped out. Then he opened his mouth and prepared to breath out fire. It was Baldwin’s special move, Fire Breath. Baldwin’s Fire Breath was a powerful skill which turned a 20 metre area into a sea of fire. But Ark just snorted and laughed.

“Heh, now you’ve run out of chances. Magicians, wait for the command!”

All the magicians concentrated and waited for the next command. Ark saw Baldwin’s mouth open wide and shouted.

“Now’s the time. All magicians aim their ice magic into its mouth!”

“Wind from the frozen north seas..... Freezing Wind!”

At the same time, hundreds of deep blue rays shot from the magicians’ hands. It was the most extreme ice magic that could even freeze seawater.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

When the frost magic hit Baldwin's mouth, it conflicted with the fire and a huge explosion took place. Steam rose from Baldwin as he screamed. The ensuing explosion had destroyed his eyeballs and his facial muscles were ripped to shreds. And his health was reduced by 30% because the magic damaged the interior of his body. He only had 5% health left.

"Everybody all together! An all-out attack!"

"Waaaaahhhh!"

The assault troops swarmed around Baldwin. Baldwin swung his 8 arms like crazy but it didn't have the same power as before. Thanks to his eyeballs being destroyed, he was in a 'blind state.' While a few arms hit the users, normally it just hit thin air. The arms were also unable to block any attacks properly. And it was thousands of troops attacking.

*-Kuaaack! How regrettable..... But..... This place..... Hell.....*

In the end, Baldwin collapsed as a bloody mess while talking nonsense. Then he gasped for breath a few times before he finally died. At the same time, 3~4 items fell on the ground.

-Your level has risen.

The message window popped in front of Ark after Baldwin died.

"Yes!"

Ark's eyes brightened as he shouted.

"Character information window!"

<b>Character Name</b>	Ark	<b>Race</b>	Human
<b>Alignment</b>	Good +500	<b>Nobility Title</b>	Baron

Fame	21,485 (+500)	Level	391
Profession		Dark Soul	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the People, Jackson’s Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal’s Hero	
Health	7,325 (+475)	Mana	7,515(+225)
Spiritual Power	956	Strength	754 (+58)
Agility	1,009 (+90)	Stamina	1,249 (+45)
Wisdom	185 (+10)	Intelligence	1,327 (+5)
Luck	179 (+60)	Flexibility	262
Art of Communication	79	Affection	117 (+10)
Resilience	479	Dark Fog	68
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		173	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople (Armour): Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
Wolf’s Feet (Shoes): Agility + 40, Movement Speed +40%, Attack Speed			

+10%, 'Jump' is available

\*<Animal King> Set effect: Strength + 20, Agility + 20, Stamina +20, Defense +40

Promised Sword(Two-handed Sword): Strength +20, Stamina +10

Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3

Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance + 100%, Agility +20, 'Magic Protection' is automatically activated when health is less than 50%.

Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available

Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available

Ark's Ring (Ring): Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Stamina + 5, Wisdom + 5, Intelligence + 5, 'Sudden Increase in Power' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

\* All abilities will increase by 50% in the dark

\* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (30 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

\* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

\* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

\* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

\* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

\* 10% increased attack and defense.

‘Isn’t this like swimming on land?’

Ark’s eyes lit up at the sight of the information window. It had only been 3 day since thy entered the secret dungeon. During that time he had gained 8 levels. This was because only elite monsters appeared in the secret dungeon. Of course, 3,800 people had entered the dungeon. Even if they were split into units of 500, the experience was still being divided by 500. However, Ark was the leader of the 3,800 attack group. In New World, the commander of a group received bonus experience. In other words, he didn’t have to share that experience with 3,800 people. Naturally, his troops also grew during those 3 days. The hunting speed of the troops was also quite quick so they sped through the dungeon at an absurd speed. After hunting so many monsters, they now received no penalty on the amount of experience gained. Thanks to that, the troops managed to gain an average of 5 people by the 3rd day.

‘But having a lot of troops isn’t always a good thing.’

“Ark-nim, we’ve collected all the loot.

Then a unit leader approached and said.

“Two magic armour and one rare weapon dropped.”

This was the only thing Ark didn’t like. Since all the monsters in the secret dungeon were elite monsters, there was a high chance of dropping magic and rare items. Sometimes 3~4 magic items would drop after fighting a middle ranked boss. Normally he would just run wild with joy but this situation was different. Thousands of people were capturing the dungeon. Furthermore, they were all Silvana’s defense troops as well as his shareholders. It wasn’t possible to be greedy for the loot and ruin the growing bond between them.



‘When Ark’s Corporation is working properly, 1~2 rare items would just be a joke. Then I should show a nonchalant attitude when distributing items.’

But there was one item that only Ark collected.

-Black Stone SculptureAn unidentified stone found in the Cradle of Ancient Evil.

<170 Knowledge of Ancient Relics is needed to confirm the item>

It was a strange, sculpture with an uneven form. Ark had found the sculpture for the first time after defeating the middle ranked boss on the 6th floor. A middle ranked boss would appear every 6th floor and would drop a sculpture with a different shape. The first sculpture required 150 Knowledge of Ancient Ruins, the second one 160 and finally the sculpture dropped by Baldwin required 170 Knowledge of Ancient Relics to identify it.

‘But I’m thankful whenever it appears.’

In fact, Ark only had 153 Knowledge of Ancient Relics when he entered the dungeon. However, he gained 10 points every time he identified a sculpture so he currently had 173 points. While the requirements for the sculpture increased with every boss, it wasn’t a problem for Ark as his Knowledge of Ancient Relics also increased. Since it increased when investigating ancient relics, he actually welcomed it when this item dropped. And Ark was the only one who could identify the sculptures so wasn’t it right that Ark monopolized it?

‘In other words, isn’t it an item that only I can grab?’

When Ark grabbed the sculpture, it vibrated and a new message window occurred.

-The Black Stone Sculpture has been identified using Knowledge of Ancient Relics.

<Knowledge of Ancient Relics +10, Intelligence +10, Luck +5 and Fame increased by 50>

-Stone Sculpture containing the Secrets of the Abyss (Level: 3)

An unknown dark power can be felt from this unrefined stone sculpture. While the sculpture looks rough at first, looking closely you can tell that it has been carefully trimmed. A weird shape is depicted on the surface but it cannot be clearly determined. The purpose of this sculpture is still unknown.

"I don't understand at all."

Even after confirming the sculpture, he couldn't understand the information at all. The information stated that there was something drawn on the surface. But all Ark could see was a few black lines drawn roughly on the surface.

"But clearly this is a clue to unravel the secret of the secret dungeon."

So far Ark had succeeded in captured dozens of dungeons. Among those were dungeons where a mystery had to be solved to clear the dungeon. Thanks to that prior experience, Ark was sure that the sculptures were the clues to this secret dungeon.

"But clearly this is a clue to unravel the secret of the secret dungeon."

"But what is this level three that appeared this time? There must be a few more sculptures. If all the pieces are found then it will probably merge into one piece."

Ark packed the sculpture away while deep in thought. Then he looked at the scattered soldiers who were taking a break.

"I guess I need to rearrange the formation."

While they've managed to capture up to the 24th floor, it wasn't without a lot of damage. The monsters levels were higher and they also had special skills. So the Justice Division received quite a bit of damage. Of

course they could re-join after 24 hours but by the time they reached the 20th floor, more people were dying than re-joining. Ark gathered the leaders together and said.

“From the next floor onwards, we’ll be advancing in units composed of 700 people. Reorganize your troops.”

“Huh? We’re already continuing?”

“Already? Did we come all the way here just to leave?”

“That’s not it..... Hasn’t it already been 20 hours since we started invading this dungeon?”

“So?”

“No, it’s just the time is already 4 a.m. I’m a student.....”

“Take a vacation.”

Ark sounded like he didn’t know what the problem was. The rehabilitation members who were watching from the sidelines just sighed and got up.

“It is useless.”

“Didn’t you previously ask why Ark’s level was so high? Do you understand now?”

“Well, that guy is like this once he starts.”

“It’s better to just go along without any useless remarks.”

That’s right. There was a reason why the rehabilitation group looked agonized when Ark mentioned the dungeon invasion. They had experience invading dungeons with Ark before. So JusticeMan used the excuse of meeting with So-mi and escaped to Lancel village with Roco. Bread and Redian used the excuse of challenging the dungeon they failed to capture when Seutandal rose in order to escape. With both JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members gone, there was no one to

lead the autonomous group so Lariette and Shambala managed to stealthily escape. However, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members didn't have an excuse so they were forced to accompany Ark on this death march.

"Now, now! The leaders should tell their troops to get up. Hurry!"

"Ooooooh...."

"The break was only for 10 minutes...."

"Is this the reason our group leader is so strong?"

"It is already the third day. I haven't seen sunlight for three days."

"Today I dreamed that wandering the dungeon was a dream."

"Should I purposely die so I can rest a little bit?"

"Knock it off. That man will even measure the time until the dead person returns. You will die in vain, come in again and want to die even more. It can't be helped. Let's just go down a few more layers. And pray that it finishes soon."

The rehabilitation members said as they stood up. So under Ark's instructions, the troops were divided into 700 people and they entered the next floor.

"Let's go. To receive fighting experience and loot!"

Ark's voice rang out loudly in the dark space. This death march would continue until the bottom floor of the dungeon could be seen.

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Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

Not far from the Sinius Principality's northeast coast. A violent shaking started to occur in the sea. The waves vibrated so much that it seemed

like a tsunami was going to occur. Eventually the ocean parted like Moses' miracle and a huge object rose up. The object was a clear dome with its size reaching hundreds of kilometres. It was two instead of one. After the huge vibration and storm settled, a huge object was floating on the ocean. After it completely emerged from the ocean. Cracks started to form on the transparent dome and it broke. Surprisingly, what appeared inside was a continent. It was a continent with mountains, plains, rivers and even flying beasts. Two continents had abruptly appeared in the huge ocean. The continents which rose from the ocean formed one continent which made contact with Sinius' coast.

Snap, snap, snap, snap, snap!

It was at that moment. Suddenly an intense spark occurred in the space above the continent. The atmosphere seemed to be split apart and showed a huge shape. What emerged from the torn space was a skyray dozens of kilometres long! The most surprising thing was on the back of the skyray. A huge castle had been erected on its back. Even in New World, this skyray was one of a kind. It was the legendary aerial fortress Rwigenberg!

"How is it? Seeing a torn continent becomes one again?"

The voice came from the top floor of the castle on Rwigenberg's back. The man with red hair flying in the wind asked as he looked at the continent. Then a man with black hair answered in a cynical voice.

"It is decent. It's not a scene which stirs up my feelings."

The man with dark hair frowned.

"Rather, I remember a difficult memory after seeing it so I feel troubled instead."

The man with red hair and the one with black hair looked down on the continent from the Rwigenberg. They were the Red Man and Alan. And there was a reason they were looking at the continent. It was because they were the ones to pull the two continents up from the other

dimension. That's right. These two continents had risen from a lower dimension. Those continents were Scale and Underworld! Thanks to the ultimate magic the Dark Lord used at the end of the Dark Century, many parts of the continent sank to a lower dimension. However, the Red Man and Alan had resurrected their World Trees which caused the land to rise up to middle earth.

"You should enjoy the outcome. You had quite a lot of troubles there but doesn't it look quite pleasant now?"

The Red Man looked down with pleased eyes. The two dimensions looked different from when they first arrived. Now a blue light covered the mountains and the plains couldn't be seen. In the bright daylight, an unidentified black aura was spreading through the continent. In addition, there were any common wild animals or birds. They were suspicious looking creatures with black auras.

"From now on this will be our home."

"Hmm, our home is an unpleasant place. It makes us look evil."

"Evil?"

The Red Man's eyes narrowed and he briefly looked at Alan. After a while he muttered in a low voice.

"That's impossible.... We are the true definition of justice."

"Does that type of talk make you feel uncomfortable?"

"It can't be helped. It is the truth."

The Red Man answered in a rough voice and turned around.

"Then let's get started. Shouldn't we inform the citizens that we have returned to this world?"

"That's right. It is why we returned."

"Rwigenberg, let's plant fear in the ignorant public!"

The Red Man smiled before shouting.

Ohhhhh!

When Rwigenberg flapped its wings, a storm occurred and it started to move at a quick pace. The place Rwigenberg headed to was the Sinius Principality. Rwigenberg appeared in the sky above the Sinius Principality in an instant. And it showered the land with black objects.

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

The object which fell and lodged into the ground was an obelisk with a dark aura. When the black obelisk was driven into the ground, its effects instantly started to spread. The ground blackened by the obelisk started to crawl with hundreds and thousands of bizarre creatures.

“Come! All you demons called gamers, it is time to collect the price for your sins!”

The Red Man’s eyes became distorted with anger. This was the turbulent start to the period where New World’s history was changed.

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“Team Chief-nim!”

At the same time in the Planning Department of Global Exos. Kim Gwon-tae’s scream resounded through the quiet office. Ho Myung-hwan who had been dozing at his desk jumped up with surprise.

“Hik! K-Kim Gwon-tae? Why are you suddenly calling for the Team Chief of the Planning Department?”

“Bring him here right now!”

“Huh? What do you need....?”

“I don’t have time to explain! Hurry!”

Kim Gwon-tae spat out urgently and Ho Myung-hwan rushed towards an office. After a while, Ha Myung-woo approached Kim Gwon-tae.

“What the, what is it? What’s going on?”

“I-I’m not sure. A few minutes ago the system started to go out of control.”

Kim Gwon-tae replied while frantically tapping on the keyboard. An incomprehensible phenomenon was occurring in front of them. While there were many phenomena involving New World’s systems that they didn’t understand, this time it was on a completely different level. Kim Gwon-tae typed in a huge amount of commands on the monitor at a tremendous speed. Kim Gwon-tae and Ha Myung-woo had never encountered this before.

“Event? Did an event start?”

“No, this is not an event.”

Kim Gwon-tae answered like he was in a trance as he continued starting at the data on the monitor.

A few minutes ago, the A level security of New World had been released. At the same time, dozens of processes had been unlocked. The only thing they could think was that this wasn’t an event, but something affecting the system.

“If this continues.....”

“Continues? What on earth?”

Ha Myung-woo shouted nervously. Kim Gwon-tae then muttered with a pale, stricken face.

“It is impossible for the main system to process all these operations at once. If it continues then the main server would overheat and blow up.”

The computing power of New World’s main server was enough that it could search New World’s entire population in 10 minutes. It was a



monster like machine. But the data occurring in front of Kim Gwon-tae was enough that not even that monster system could handle it. It was like a nuclear bomb had been dropped..... It was like a bomb of data had hit the system.

“What, what the? Explode? What are you saying?”

“No, an explosion might be better. If the defense systems of the main server malfunctions and the enormous amount of data flows back into the units.....”

Ha Myung-woo’s face stiffened at Kim Gwon-tae’s words. Even the dirt on the side of the road in New World required an absurd amount of data. If that absurd data flowed back into the user’s brain then the result was obvious. The explosion of data would go beyond the brain’s tolerance and the brains would be smashed like tofu. Ha Myung-woo grabbed Kim Gwon-tae’s shirt and yelled.

“Stop it! Do whatever it takes! Stop it even if you have to break the server!”

“B-but.....It is already too late..... The amount of data is already beyond the tolerance limit.....”

Kim Gwon-tae yanked at his hair with a hopeless expression. Pak! All of a sudden there was a blackout as the power was turned off in the Planning Department. After 0.1 seconds, the power supply turned back on.

“Eh? What is this?”

The various staff throughout the Planning Department were puzzled. The phenomenon which occurred on Kim Gwon-tae’s monitor had spread to dozens of other monitors in the Planning Department. The staff looked bewildered by the phenomenon. But only one person was making a different expression.

“I-it is impossible.....!”

Kim Gwon-tae hurriedly connected his laptop to the main computer. But the same phenomenon occurred to his laptop as soon as it was connected. Kim Gwon-tae's face turned pale with fear.

"U-unbelievable.....!"

"What? What's going on?"

"The main system of New World has hacked into the computer network.

"Hacking?"

"Yes. The computer handling the main system judged it couldn't handle the data alone so it dispersed it to other computers on the network. All the computers at headquarters as well as the Planning Department are probably in the same situation. Maybe even to servers of different games. This is.....This is.....It's not a monster but a devil! Even if all the hackers in the world are collected, such a thing is impossible!"

Kim Gwon-tae spoke with a lot of fear. Ha Myung-woo felt a little relieved after hearing Kim Gwon-tae's words.

"Anyway, now the chance of the data flowing back into the unit is blocked. However....."

Ha Myung-woo looked at the date on the monitor with unsure eyes. He couldn't help exclaiming.

".....What the hell is going on?"

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"Rururu, lalala~!"

While other situations were progressing here and there. Sid was on the deck of a boat and humming while feeling the cool sea breezes.

"Huhuhu, this is fantastic."

The goods on the item were changed for items in Seutandal's warehouse. After trading in Seutandal, those goods were now being transported to Reuben Harbour in Schudenberg. The reason Sid could trade so quickly was because Ark was the owner of the trading office in Seutandal. So there was no reason to bargain about the price. By trading goods at one place, they could move it to another place where the goods weren't as common and receive a profit for it. If the goods were moved along then he could triple the profit.

"I've earned 6,000 gold just by changing the goods in Seutandal."

That profit also showed up as experience for Sid so he quickly levelled up. And he would be able to gain experience like this for a while.

"Now my troubles have ended and it is time to be happy! Let's go, Gold Dream!"

Sid jumped and shouted after felling the overwhelming emotions. It was at that moment. The ocean in front of him suddenly turned white.

"Eh? What the?"

Bugul bugul, bugul bugul.

When he concentrated his eyes, bubbles were rising from under the ocean.

"What's this? What is boiling underneath the water?"

Sid said without any traces of his former joy. At first only 1~2 air bubbles appeared. But after a while, there were an absurd number of bubbles and the ocean looked like it was boiling. Another a moment, something huge appeared from under the ocean.

Chwaaaaak!

"Eh eh eh? Eh eh eh eh? Eh eh eh eh?"

Sid raised his head with a bemused expression. Then he continuously looked the object up and down before screaming. After a while, the

movements of the huge object suddenly stopped. It was huge! No, even the word huge was insufficient. Compared to the size of the huge object, the 6 sailboats looked like a toy. Then a circular object in the centre started moving. Eyes! That's right. It was the eyes of a huge object. And the enormous object which rose from the ocean was.....!

Roaaaaar!

The lower part of the monster's mouth opened. At the same time, sea water was swept in to the monster's mouth as the 6 sailboats approached it.

"Waaaaah.....!"

Sid screamed like crazy. That was the only piece of resistance Sid could do.

TO BE CONTINUED